This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07480142 8

My Rest Cure

By George Robey

Illustrated by John Hassall

Asmvat
NEW-YORK
SOCIETY
LIBRARY
1758

NYSX

MY REST CURE

An ear-splitting din bursts upon me like a shower of shrapnel

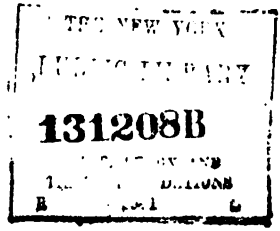
[See page 24]

My Rest Cure

by George Ade

Illustrated by John Hassall

Published by Frederick A. Stokes Company
New York
©1919



Copyright, 1919, by
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY

All rights reserved

FEB 18 1921

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	I Collapse	9
II	I Leave Home	27
III	I Catch a Train	34
IV	The Train to Slocum	44
V	Claret Cup	53
VI	Visions	61
VII	The Way to Little Slocum	65
VIII	I Arrive	75
IX	The Sunrise Arms	81
X	Muscular Christianity	90
XI	Not All Lavender	105
XII	Good Night	114
XIII	Sybil	123
XIV	On Album Etiquette	129
XV	Aquatic	140
XVI	Prize-Giving	149
XVII	I Receive	155

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVIII	I Feel Frightful	173
XIX	I Feel Worse	180
XX	I Feel Worse and Worse	190
XXI	Mrs. Simmings and Hygiene	201
XXII	Mrs. Simmings Remains	209
XXIII	The Only Way	219
XXIV	I Escape	226

ILLUSTRATIONS

AN EAR-SPLITTING DIN BURSTS UPON ME LIKE A SHOWER OF SHRAPNEL . . . *Frontispiece*

PAGE

I'M SICK OF BEING FUNNY 10

THE PIECE OF MERMAID STRUCK ME ON THE HEAD . 12

THE CHILDREN CLUSTERED ABOUT MY KNEES RIGHT ENOUGH 15

THIS SORT OF HUMOR APPEALS TOO MUCH TO THE GALLERY 17

HORATIO BOTTOMLEY HAIG DOES NOT BELIEVE IN SUFFERING IN SILENCE 18

COOK'S SOBS GREW LOUDER 31

THE OLD LADY MADE A RIDICULOUS FUSS 37

AN UNPLEASANT PERSON WITH THE FACE AND WAISTCOAT OF A PROFITEER 45

MY FACE IS ALLOWED TO RESUME ITS NORMAL ASPECT 51

"IT'S ALL RIGHT," HE REPLIED. HE SEEMED TO SPEAK WITH DIFFICULTY 59

I CAN PICTURE MY SURROUNDINGS AT THE SUNRISE ARMS 63

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

WILLIAM AND WALTER ARE THE TWO OLDEST INHABITANTS OF LITTLE SLOCUM 67

THE VILLAGE IDIOT 77

MY HOST AND HOSTESS 82

THE VILLAGE IDIOT HELPED ME TO UNPACK . . . 88

A SHRIEK OF MERRIMENT FROM THE AUDIENCE . . 93

IT WAS THE VICAR'S PERSONALITY THAT MISLED ME . 101

A HOUSE IN DÉSHABILLE—EVERY VARIETY OF DÉSHABILLE 111

TOGETHER, HAND IN HAND, WE LEAVE THE HOUSE . 117

I SWING FOR A MOMENT FROM THE APEX OF THE POLE 146

MY FIGURE, HE SAYS, HAS NEVER BEEN PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD 158

MR. MORT, THE VILLAGE PHARMACIST 161

ALBERT THATCHER, THE VILLAGE GENIUS 165

THE SEWING-BEE 179

MRS. SIMMINGS, RETURNS LADEN WITH FOOD . . . 222

TEN MILES IN A MACKINTOSH AND WADING BOOTS . . 230

CHAPTER I

I Collapse

I'm sick of being funny. Fed up. Bored stiff. That's why I'm starting this diary. One doesn't have to be funny in a diary. One can be serious. It's a treat to me to be serious. In these pages I mean to revel in being serious. Even solemn. I intend to have a perfect debauch of melancholy. Lord, what a relief it'll be!

But this is not the right way to begin a diary. Not the right and proper way. One must be right and proper. It's been my motto all through life. Go away, you boys. All through life. Very well, then. First of all, the date. If possible the time, and if you haven't got the time or the inclination—but that's another story. I will now begin.

Aug. 14*th,* 1918 (2.30 *p.m.*)

Dear Diary, no mortal eyes but mine shall

ever behold thee. (I have read hundreds of diaries and they all begin like this. So that's all right, and I hope my publishers will like it.) But before proceeding any farther, let me once more warn the thousands of readers who will eagerly peruse these pages: *I will not be funny.* They can't expect it of me, and I'm not going to do it.

I'M SICK OF BEING FUNNY

I haven't been feeling at all the thing lately. People don't seem to realize what a frightful strain this funny business is to a man of my peculiar temperament. I am not naturally a funny man. By nature I am of a gentle, melancholy disposition. A pro-

found thinker. Something like Hamlet. Only not so conversational. And I don't talk about myself as much as Hamlet does either. Providence has endowed me with an earnest, serious spirit. It has also endowed me with eyebrows. The eyebrows show most. Hence I have been compelled to adopt a profession strangely at variance with my true character. What a strain. What an effort. What wear and tear. To have to be jocular when you're feeling jaundiced—to grin when you want to groan. It's a dog's life.

And now this new revue. It's worrying me to death. Is it going to be a success? How can I tell till I know what sort of a part I'm going to have? What's the plot? I don't know. We've only been rehearsing ten weeks. I believe I've got a song and dance somewhere. Or is it a duet? I forget with whom. Here's the part; I must have a look at it. Great Scott! Quite a lot of lines! Half a page. With business, that'll be forty pages. I must talk to the author. He'll have to cut.

Yes, of course, I remember now, I have got a song. That's how the accident happened. At rehearsal this morning. What a nerve these chorus ladies have got! That girl had no business to go leaning against the scenery (ocean-waves and mermaids). She said she felt tired. In the middle of my song! A piece of mermaid that hadn't been properly braced (no, gentle reader, you're quite wrong, she didn't. She wore the usual mermaid's costume. Besides, how could she? Mermaids have tails, of course. And braced is a technical term meaning fastened *down*). Any-

THE PIECE OF MERMAID STRUCK ME ON THE HEAD

way, the piece of mermaid struck me on the head. I felt annoyed. I had a nasty headache. Moreover, the mermaid had been freshly painted. Part of her stuck to my hair. I do hate being messed about. And if there's one thing I dislike it's green hair. But I didn't lose my temper. No. I'm proud to remember I behaved like a gentleman. When everybody laughed, I alone preserved my dignity. Drawing myself up to my full height, in a few simple words I told them what I thought of them.

The stage manager drew me aside. "Look here, old man," said he, "you'd better have the afternoon off. You've been working too hard, and this business has upset you. What you want is the quiet home atmosphere. There is nothing so healing to the tired body, the overworked brain, as the domestic hearth. Your wife ministering to your simple wants. Your children clustering about your knees. Go home, George," he said. "Forget for a while that you are England's premier humorist. (He's really

a very decent chap, our stage manager. I must buy him some cigarettes.) Forget for a while the toil and moil of the footlights. Remember only that you are a husband and a father."

So I went home. The moment I crossed the threshold I remembered that I was a husband and a father. I have always understood that the period of teething of the ordinary infant begins at the age of six months or thereabouts. Horatio Bottomley Haig, our youngest, is no ordinary infant. He has been teething ever since he was born. He was teething when I got home. My wife was so busy ministering to H. B. Haig's simple wants that she had to postpone ministering to mine. But the children clustered about my knees right enough. Horatio B. is too young to cluster, but there are others. They clustered, not only about my knees, but on my feet as well. They not only clustered. They jumped about. Seven is a good number for clustering. It is too large for jumping.

THE CHILDREN CLUSTERED ABOUT MY KNEES RIGHT ENOUGH

How strangely the irony of fate repeats itself! (This is a very good line for a diary. It is always popular. And sometimes it really means something. It does in this case. What luck!) Very well. The irony of fate repeats itself in the case of my eldest son, George. George has inherited his father's peculiar sweetness of disposition and gentle melancholy. He has also inherited the eyebrows. Thus the poor lad is obliged to be a humorist. I am sorry for the boy. But it cannot be helped. I have told him the sooner he gets used to it the better. So George does his best. His best is not always what I should have chosen for him. To-day, for instance, it has taken the form of a pin. A simple pin, rectangularly bent and placed upon a chair. My chair. A primitive form of humor. The pin, in juxtaposition with the human body. Preferably that portion of the human body approximating most nearly to the ordinary receptacle for pins which is to be found on every dressing-table.

Personally I don't care for this sort of humor. It appeals too much to the gallery. I told George so. Very kindly and quietly. Not in so many words. But I think he understood. It will be some time before he is able to sit down without self-consciousness. I, too—but I am not one to talk about myself.

THIS SORT OF HUMOR APPEALS TOO MUCH TO THE GALLERY

I have every reason to believe that though Horatio Bottomley Haig's teeth are a trifle behind, his lungs are well up to date. H. B. Haig

HORATIO BOTTOMLEY HAIG DOES NOT BELIEVE IN SUFFERING IN SILENCE

does not believe in suffering in silence. And H. B. Haig suffers much. The quiet home atmosphere vibrates with his protestations. But even as I write there comes a moment of abnormal, unnatural peace. I wait. I listen. I wonder uneasily. Something strange has happened. What can it be?

My wife is a good woman. I despise myself for doubting her. She loves Horatio B., I know. And yet—those yells!

They have ceased! This unearthly stillness—what does it portend? Can she——? Is it possible——? Has she, in a fit of temporary despair, taken some desperate step to silence the hapless infant? And, if so, has she poisoned or only chloroformed Horatio B.?

Cold shivers creep up and down my spine. I have read of such things. Never until this moment have I realized how dear Horatio B. Haig is to me. I recall all his lovable, baby ways—the charming way he dribbles, his pretty habit of poking his fist into my eyes, his engaging, masculine impatience when he requires nourishment. If anything should have happened to him!

The door is flung open, my wife rushes in. Horatio B. is in her arms—motionless, *silent.*

"It has come at last," says my wife, and her voice trembles.

A faintness, a dreadful sickness creeps upon me. I clutch at the whatnot for support. I try to speak.

"Is he—dead?" I gasp.

"Idiot!"

The homely, familiar word revives me as nothing else could have done.

"*What* has come?" I manage to gasp.

"His first tooth, of course!"

So that was why Horatio B. was silent. The silence of pride and contentment. The pride and contentment of perfect achievement.

"Feel!" says my wife.

Obediently I place my finger into Horatio B. Haig's mouth.

* * * * * *

Horatio B. bit me. Yes, he bit me. It was a cowardly act. I hate to record it of a child of mine, but truth is truth, and this is my diary. Do you blame me, dear Diary (this is the very best diary style, believe me) —do you blame me, dear Diary, for what I did then?

With one tooth and a whole lot of sharp gum he bit me, his own father, the author of his being—*one* of the authors, at any rate. But this is being pernicketty.

I will not submit to being bitten—not by anybody, not anywhere.

I hate a spoilt child. Horatio B. shall not be spoilt; he shall be educated. His savage impulses shall be nipped in the bud.

I feel convinced I did the right thing when I slapped Horatio B. My wife thinks otherwise. She has gone so far as to call me a brute, just because I am determined to stand no nonsense from the child.

There are some people you cannot reason with. My wife is one, Horatio B. is another. I was obliged to slap him. My wife asked why I did not slap *her*. Her tone was bitter. I replied gently. I slapped Horatio because he is too young to slap back. I did not slap her because——

Explanations are a mistake. They sometimes lead to the telling of the truth. To one delicately nurtured as I have been the truth is shocking. My wife has shocked me this afternoon. I can't help feeling glad that neither Stoll nor de Courville was there to hear what she said. They might have

imagined I was being overpaid. You never know, with these impressionable natures.

My wife has pointed out many things to me to-day. I realize that I am the worst character in Great Britain, Ireland, and the Colonies, possibly including Berlin. I am also the most foolish, the worst tempered, and the least handsome. In vain I agree with her. She will not be pacified. She says it is a pity she ever married me. Once more I agree with her. She bursts into tears. She has hysterics. Her sobs mingle with the howls of Horatio B. Haig.

In vain I apologize. I am not a conceited man. But if there is one thing I *can* do it's apologize. Much practice has made me perfect. With all due modesty I mention it: I have made strong men cry with my apologies—they have cried like little children. But to-day my wife is adamant. She will not listen. She weeps, but she weeps with rage. She pours forth torrents of scorn and contumely. I shrivel and wither. She withdraws, clasping the infant to her bosom.

So it has come to this: Loathed and despised by my wife, hated by my youngest child, who bites and defies me, momentarily estranged from my first-born, what is left to me but—*work?* Eagerly, desperately, as a drowning man clutches at a straw, I clutch at my part. I take an instantaneous dislike to it. It is not funny. I fail to see how I can make it funny. I am seized with a frightful suspicion. *Is it the part that is really to blame or is it—me?*

I am aware that I have been frequently described as Clean and Clever. I used to pride myself on being Clean and Clever. *Am* I Clean and Clever? Have I ever been Clean and Clever? Shall I ever again be Clean and Clever?

The hideous doubt grows upon me. My head is splitting; I feel dizzy and shaken.

Hark! What clamor of sounds is this? Dimly, darkly, I try to remember something. I have seven children—or is it seventy? I am not certain. At any rate, they are musical. Somebody is always playing some-

thing somewhere, separately or simultaneously. Is that James practicing the cornet in the bathroom? Or Emma playing the flute in the scullery? Or Charles coaxing the oboe in the attic? Or is it merely a buzzing in my head? My head, that is shortly about to burst!

No! No buzzing in the head, no singing in the ears is this. The awful sounds grow nearer. The squeal of wood, the shriek of brass, the tum-tum of drums, mingle with the tramp of marching feet. What infernal melody is this emerging dimly now and then from all the din and babel? Shades of the Bing Boys!

My head feels like an alarm clock. The alarm is going off. It refuses to stop. It mingles with the general medley of sound. My study door flies open; an ear-splitting din bursts upon me like a shower of shrapnel; my seventy children advance upon me, surround me, stun me and deafen me. My brain reels, my head swims, I throw up my hands, panic-stricken. My children become

so many dancing demons. Something inside the alarm clock goes crack! The world grows dark, the inferno of sound ceases. The last straw has broken the camel's back.

* * * * * *

"Nerve-strain," says my doctor. "Your arduous calling—the worry and anxiety of this new production. Yes—your case is perfectly clear. A rest cure is what you want. Go away to some quiet spot in the country, far from the madding crowd."

"Yes, yes," says my wife, all tenderness and forgiveness. "We will go at once. To-morrow I will telephone to the Stores for country outfits for the children and me."

In my exhausted condition I still have strength left to shake my head at the doctor. In my anxiety I may have overdone the business. All the same, the doctor is an ass. He says, "Complete change and rest." Yet he misunderstands the shaking of my head.

"St. Vitus's dance!" he murmurs. "His nerves are completely shattered."

I manage to hiss a few broken words into his ear. He understands.

"Your husband must go alone, poor fellow." An excellent man, my doctor, take him all round. A little slow in the uptake, but sound at bottom. "Complete change and rest is what he needs—nothing whatever to remind him of the theater, of his profession, of his troubles. Not even you, dear madam."

Reluctantly, tearfully, my wife acquiesces.

Though it breaks my heart, I must go alone.

But whither?

The doctor, bless him, can recommend the very place. A few telegrams, and everything is happily arranged. To-morrow I shall start my rest cure at the Sunrise Arms, Little Slocum, Slopshire.

CHAPTER II

I Leave Home

The worst of Little Slocum is getting there. I've been getting there ever since I woke up this morning.

First of all there was packing. That's what I hate about a holiday. It begins with packing and it ends with packing —not to mention unpacking. It's such a job, making up one's mind what to take with one and what to leave at home. And it's a waste of time, when all's said and done, because whatever you leave at home you're sure to want, and whatever you take is sure to be the wrong thing. It doesn't matter how sanely and sensibly you argue it out beforehand. Now, for instance, I argued it all out with myself most carefully. I was going away into the country in the middle of August. My experience of the British

climate bade me unhesitatingly to pack my winter undies and snow-boots. I did so. Hardly had I reached Paddington, however, before the sun began to shine, quite like the old-fashioned summer we have heard our grandfathers speak about—women going about without their furs and that sort of thing. I shall have to wire to the wife as soon as I get to Slocum to post me on all the things I have left behind.

Next to packing, what I hate most is the bother of cabs—the worry of it all. First of all the worry of trying to persuade the taxi people to spare one of their valuable vehicles, and then the worry of wondering if it's going to turn up. Mine did turn up, but it turned up late. Why is it that cabs always turn up either much too early or else much too late? There's no depending on them.

I had arranged everything perfectly, so as to leave myself just enough, and not too much, time to say "Good-by" to the family in. I had ordered the cab for twenty

minutes past three. At nineteen minutes past my luggage was piled up ready in the hall. I had kissed the children all round, shaken hands with the maids—saying a few well-chosen words to each—and I was preparing to embrace the wife to the accompaniment of wheels without, which would cut short the painful parting.

There were no wheels without.

Five minutes passed. I kissed the children once more; I shook hands with the maids once more; I said some more well-chosen words. Still no wheels without.

Ten minutes passed. When you have done everything you can possibly do and said everything you can possibly say, time hangs heavily.

The cab is fifteen minutes late. Again I kiss the children and shake hands with the maids. This time my words are not so well chosen.

Twenty minutes late. If it doesn't come soon I shall miss the train.

I shake hands with the children and kiss

the maids. Some one begins to sob loudly. It is cook. I apologize. I did not mean to outrage her modesty; it was quite a mistake. Cook's sobs grow louder. I keep on apologizing. Cook's sobs grow cataclysmic. Surely the woman is a prude. When a man is on the verge of a nervous breakdown may he not be forgiven if in a fit of absent-mindedness he kisses his cook? Before all the world. In the presence of his own wife. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.* I should just think so.

But I wronged cook, after all. She explained between her sobs. She wept, she told us, because she had a presentiment that she would never see me again. I had the look, she said, of one who is not long for this world. At that the parlor-maid burst into tears, the 'tweeny began to howl loudly, and the twins lifted up their voices in sympathy.

I was annoyed with cook. Of course, I don't believe in these silly presentiments. All the same, I wish the woman had kept them to herself. They frightened the chil-

COOK'S SOBS GREW LOUDER

dren. The twins seemed inconsolable, poor little things. I was touched by their grief. And that idiot of a 'tweeny kept on blubbering too, and telling the wife that cook was "very physic." I suppose she meant psychic. I don't like psychic cooks. It isn't necessary. Of course, I don't believe in nonsense of that sort. But it would have made some people nervous. And I'm really not feeling at all well just now.

The sound of wheels at last. Thank the Lord, the cab! I had ordered a taxi. It was a horse-cab that arrived, but no matter. It was a vehicle. Besides, it was no good remonstrating. Cabmen are a callous and truculent race, and this cabman looked it every inch. The minute I set eyes on him I had a presentiment—but I don't believe in presentiments.

My trunk is a good trunk—a splendid trunk. A trifle large, I admit, but I believe in a good, large trunk—a trunk that will hold everything you want it to hold without any niggling and scheming, a trunk you can

throw things into just as they occur. I can't stand that jig-saw puzzle way of packing—making your socks fit into the toes of your boots and winding up your collars round the soap and that sort of thing. I could see from the first that that cabman had taken a dislike to my good trunk. There was that look in his eye as he helped me hoist it on to his beastly cab, and he murmured something about its not being a trunk but a blooming country cottage, only he didn't say blooming. I thought it best to take absolutely no notice—much more gentlemanly and dignified than bandying words. Besides, there wasn't time.

CHAPTER III

I Catch a Train

I am glad I decided to go to the station alone, considering what happened on the way. Could I have had a presentiment? But no, of course not—there's no such thing. I merely wanted to spare her and myself the pain of a public leave-taking. Saying "Good-by" at home while you're waiting for the cab is bad enough. But the same sort of thing on the platform! Not if I can help it. You know what invariably happens. You are seated in your compartment. Your wife or lady friend is standing on the platform. You are expecting the train to start at any moment. You have already remarked "Take care of yourself," and "Don't forget to write soon," and "Kiss the children (if any) for me." Your fellow passengers are hanging eagerly

upon your every word. You can think of nothing more to say except "I hope it'll keep fine," and that, you decide, is banal. At last the guard gives the warning; the train is about to start. Greatly relieved, you imprint the final peck, and you get out your pocket-handkerchief ready to wave—and the train does not start.

I had made up my mind to spare the wife all this. I little thought what more I was going to spare her. If ever there was a fiend in human form it is that cabman. He was to blame for everything—he and his rotten vehicle. I don't blame the horse in the least. All honor where honor is due. The horse behaved through it all like a perfect gentleman—attached to any ordinary healthy cab and guided by a Christian driver that horse would have taken me to Paddington in fifteen minutes. As it was—well, by a miracle I am alive, though considerably shaken.

I suspected there was going to be trouble the first time my trunk fell off. When

it fell off a second and then a third time I realized the man intended to make a hobby of it. I remonstrated mildly. I pointed out that the trunk might kill somebody; that it might even get smashed itself. With fiendish nonchalance that cabman bade me help him to hoist it up for the third time.

We could have gone no more than half a dozen yards when crash it went again. A squeal—woman's shriek. I leapt out of the accursed vehicle. My heart was in my mouth. I steeled myself to meet the worst.

It was pretty bad. Rarely have I seen anything to equal the woman's fury. I saw in a moment what had happened. The trunk had missed most of the dog, but it had nipped off a small piece of its tail. And that was absolutely all that had happened.

But the old lady made a ridiculous fuss. I pointed out to her, quite nicely, what a blessing it was the trunk hadn't fallen on top of *her* and nipped off a piece of her—but it's no use reasoning with that kind of woman.

I didn't think any old lady knew there *were* such words. It just shows. One never can tell. A most respectable-looking old lady. Poppies and ears of corn in her bonnet. Quite a lady. Gloves and all.

THE OLD LADY MADE A RIDICULOUS FUSS

I hate a scene, so I gave her half a crown to get a new dog. Even that didn't satisfy her, and the cabman made things worse. He oughtn't to have told her he could make a better dog than that out of tea-leaves. I was very glad when we had collected the luggage and started again.

The cabman now produced a rope from somewhere (I stifled a powerful impulse to ask him why he hadn't hanged himself with it at an earlier date) and condescended to rope the trunk to the rack.

That man takes no pride in his cab—none whatever. A cabman who takes a pride in his cab would be sure to see that the wheels are on properly. This fellow must have fastened one of his on much too carelessly. It oughtn't to have come off so easily without some sort of warning. It was quite a shock. One minute I was sitting inside the cab quite quietly and peaceably, the next minute I was looking out of the window. I didn't seem to want to look out of the window—I had to.

And I didn't mean to stand on my head in the middle of the road. I don't do these things as a rule. It was all very annoying. I do dislike attracting attention.

When I recovered consciousness there was quite a crowd. I saw from the look of pleased expectation on their faces that they thought

I was badly hurt, if not dead. I didn't like to disappoint them, so I shut my eyes again.

There was a policeman taking notes, of course. I would like to know what becomes of all the notes a policeman takes, and where he gets all the note-books from. Or does he rub out as he goes along?

Some one was pinching me. She didn't mean to pinch me, of course. She was a V.A.D., a charming girl, and she was saying things to the policeman.

"I think one of his legs is fractured in two places and I'm not sure about the other one, but this arm feels very funny; I expect it's broken."

The policeman wrote furiously in his note-book.

"He fell on his head? Well, then, I'm afraid he's got concussion of the brain."

"Might 'ave been a nasty accident," said the policeman.

"Of course, I'm not quite sure about this leg," said the pretty V.A.D. "You see, I

only wash up at the hospital, and I make the cocoa."

I thought this was charmingly modest of her, and I hated to disappoint her about the fractured leg and the concussion. But I had to catch my train, so I got up and told her that the only fractured thing about me so far was my wrist-watch.

The crowd were fearfully annoyed, and melted away, muttering.

The pretty V.A.D. really took it very nicely, I must say. She stopped to help me pick up some vests and haberdashery that had dropped out of a hole in my trunk.

That devilish cabman actually had the nerve to say he'd noticed the hole as soon as he'd set eyes on my trunk standing in my hall. The man is a l——the man has a wonderful talent for journalism.

The audacity of the fellow. Had the cheek to demand his fare and half a sovereign for damage to cab. Said it was my trunk that did it. In falling it had hit the wheel and smashed the hub. Of course I refused

to pay. The policeman went on taking notes. I hope he bowdlerized the cabman's conversation. The charming V.A.D. fled hastily.

I should like to wring that fellow's neck. I began to tell him what I thought of him. Then I remembered my train. I begged the policeman to leave off taking notes for a moment and whistle for a taxi. He smiled pityingly. Had I asked him to whistle for a dodo he could not have smiled more pityingly.

Six months elapsed—at least, it seemed six months. To be quite exact, six minutes.

The way I entered Paddington Station is not a way I should have chosen. But no taxi appeared, and the hand-cart did appear. That was the great thing in its favor. The hand-cart was large and the boy was small. But, having regard to my trunk, that was better than had the cart been small and the boy large.

And we arrived, my good trunk and I. That, after all, is the point. We caught

our train, greatly to the annoyance of the porters and other railway officials.

I was struck by the aloofness, the air of detachment, of proud reserve, that characterizes the porters of Paddington. Few of them, seemingly, were engaged. They merely did not want to be engaged. I suppose they are porters because they like the uniform or the scenery. Those whom I ventured to accost appeared to be deaf-and-dumb. Some shook their heads and turned away. Others did not shake their heads and turned away. There was an air of leisurely, unruffled calm about them that filled me with respectful awe. I realized how presumptuous I had been. I would have apologized handsomely to them, but did not feel sufficiently important.

At any rate, I have the satisfaction of knowing that my good trunk is in the luggage-van, because I placed it there myself. "Placed" is not a good word. I should not have written "placed."

"Placed" conveys a sense of ease, of

elegance, of lightness. Somehow, it does not convey the way I got my trunk into the luggage-van. But no word in the English language does. Let me leave it at that. The trunk is in. I totter up the platform, I fall into the handiest compartment, the guard blows his whistle, the train begins to move. I have caught my train.

CHAPTER IV

The Train to Slocum

The door of my compartment is wrenched open, something comes hurtling through and settles down upon my knee. For some moments I support—unwillingly, but not, I hope, ungracefully—a stertorously breathing, palpitating bulk, that presently resolves itself into a female of generous figure, clasping a basket of the same, and subsides into the empty seat beside me.

She apologizes. She begs me not to misunderstand the liberty. I assure her that I do not. She appears greatly relieved. So am I.

I become aware of the contents of the basket. Fish, or George is not my name.

The person in the opposite corner—an unpleasant person with the face and waistcoat of a profiteer—begins to sniff insultingly.

He addresses her as "Madam," and asks her whether she is aware that this is a first-class compartment.

AN UNPLEASANT PERSON WITH THE FACE AND WAISTCOAT OF A PROFITEER

She expresses surprise, and remarks that she would never have known it by the look of *him*. Thereafter conversation languishes.

It is very pleasant to lean back in my corner and rest. Presently I shall bring out

my books and papers, and by-and-by I shall eat.

That is what I like about traveling: good books are wasted on a railway journey. Everybody says so. And so you can read the books you like reading, unblushingly and without shame.

"Oh, any drivel will do to read in the train!" we tell one another, and settle down joyously to a two-shilling novel with a flaming cover.

"Better take plenty to eat, the train may be late." That's another capital idea. The wife always insists on that—plenty of nice sandwiches in case the train is late and also to pass away the time.

She always cuts the sandwiches herself because it's one of the things cook can't do. Nobody can cut sandwiches like the wife. She knows exactly how I like them—the bread cut nice and thin and the butter spread nice and thick, the ham neither too fat nor too lean, and so cleverly disposed that it doesn't flop out and hang down over one's chin

in one large slab, as is the way with inferior sandwiches.

But just now I don't want to eat and I don't want to read. I am very tired, and a little dizzy still from the events of the last half-hour. I simply want to rest. I need rest.

Then why can't I rest? There is a man in this compartment who won't let me. He and the Unpleasant Person are my only fellow-travelers. This man has an honest and kindly disposition. At least, he has one of those voices that denote an honest and kindly disposition—a bluff, hearty sort of a voice—the sort of voice that is as good as a smack in the face.

I was just beginning to drop off nicely when that hearty voice brought me round again with stunning force.

When I recovered from the blow, I realized that I was being asked what I should do with the Kaiser. I replied that I didn't know I was expected to do anything with the Kaiser

—that, in fact, I should be very embarrassed by the gift.

But the Hearty One is one of those people who never listen to the other fellow's answers. They simply ask you a question because they're going to answer it themselves.

So the Hearty One didn't wait for me to finish my sentence, but went on at once to tell me and the Unpleasant Person what *he* would do with the Kaiser. I can't remember everything, but I think it included bricklaying in Belgium, penal servitude for life, immediate execution, and stoking a British submarine.

It struck me that even Wilhelm's versatility would be severely taxed, but I said nothing. I hoped to be able to doze off unobserved in the argument that broke out between the Hearty One and the Unpleasant Person, who begins nearly all his sentences with "I entirely disagree with you."

No such luck; I was aroused by another stinging blow from the hearty voice. Under

cover of asking my advice on the situation in Central China (I didn't know there *was* a situation in Central China), the Hearty One hurled facts about Central China at me as one hurls stones from a catapult.

I don't remember what he said—I never *can* remember facts. But I was greatly impressed. I might say battered. The lady with fish began to droop visibly. She got out at the next station, looking white and drawn. I would have got out too, but I am anchored to this compartment by two suit-cases and a hat-box. Besides, she might have thought I was following her. I hate to be thought fast.

I wish I were a strong-minded man. I should then be very rude to the H.O. But I can't be rude to this well-meaning, kindly soul. With the U.P. it would be quite different. I could easily be rude to *him*—an unmannerly fellow who glares and growls and insults a lady because she smells slightly of fish.

Is there a greater bore on God's earth than

the genial, well-informed stranger who desires to share his information with you? I think not.

I am weak and desperate. My nerves are in a bad way. I want peace and rest, and the Hearty One is now trumpeting forth blasts of facts concerning the Irish question and what Sir Edward Carson said at the Albert Hall in nineteen hundred and four.

It is then I bethink me of my diary. Hail, happy thought! With the manner of one who suddenly remembers an urgent duty, I take out my diary and begin to write. I write feverishly, furiously. It is an inspiration. The H.O. is baffled for the nonce. Thenceforward he concentrates upon the U.P. It serves the U.P. right. At last my face is allowed to relax its expression of intelligent alertness (very wearing to the face) and resume its normal aspect (see illustration).

As I write I can hear the H.O. still, but as I am no longer being directly addressed I don't mind so much. I can hear him discoursing upon the Parliamentary franchise

for women, the influence of Nonconformity upon ostrich farming in Cape Colony, the marriage customs of the Aztecs, the effect

MY FACE IS ALLOWED TO RESUME ITS NORMAL ASPECT

of music upon infant mortality, and the advantages and disadvantages of the decimal system. At this particular moment he appears to be embarked upon a comparison be-

tween the nutritive properties of the turnip and the swede.

That reminds me, I'm feeling a bit peckish. Had nothing but a cup of tea since lunch. I think I could eat one of those sandwiches. And, now I come to think of it, I could do with a drink. I'm glad I got the wife to fill the Thermos with claret-cup instead of cocoa. A nice, cool, long drink, after all I've gone through—well, here goes.

CHAPTER V

Claret Cup

As soon as I get to Slocum I shall wire to the wife to spank the Twins. I know it was the Twins. At first I suspected George Junior. Then I remember it was the Twins who brought me up the Thermos and the parcel of sandwiches from the kitchen. I might have known there was something wrong. It struck me at the time what angels the little devils looked.

I am annoyed. Very much annoyed. It's not so much the disappointment I mind—though I admit I am exceedingly hungry. And thirsty. But it isn't that so much. There is a lack of dignity about the whole incident that pains me. And a lack of justice too. That a generous impulse on my part should have made matters worse! That's what rankles.

If I had been greedy, if I had kept all the sandwiches to myself, I should not now be thirsty as well as hungry. It's most unfair. Next time I have a generous impulse I shall smother it. Next time I shall keep myself to myself. I shan't care what people think. But it looked such an enormous packet of sandwiches—enough for three people at least—and it seemed a nice idea, somehow, to share them with my fellow-travelers, to neutralize any effect of churlishness my aloofness from the conversation might have created.

I can see those two now—how their faces lit up with pleasure as I offered them those sandwiches. Even the Unpleasant Person looked almost affable as he took two by mistake and thanked me.

He annoyed me, though, when I saw him open the sandwich to see what was inside. I might have known he was that sort of person, of course—the sort of person who looks a gift horse in the mouth.

I saw him peer at the sandwich through

his glasses for quite a long time. The man clearly had no manners. He actually poked the sandwich with his finger, clapped it to again, snorted three times, then, slowly and deliberately, his eyes fixed upon me with a peculiar expression, he dropped my sandwich out of the carriage window.

Objectionable person! What did he mean? Was this a studied insult? Did he want to provoke a quarrel with me?

I looked at the Hearty One. He was masticating. I reflected that he masticated as heartily as he did everything else. No doubt, I said to myself, his well-stocked mind has assimilated the maxim of the late Mr. Gladstone—he is chewing each mouthful thirty times.

I was about to carry my own sandwich to my mouth, when the U.P. leaned forward in his seat.

"I suppose you think that's funny?" he remarked unpleasantly.

"Think what's funny?" I demanded, speaking with dignity and restraint. To round

off the sentence, I took a bite of my sandwich.

Then I understood. I understood the meaning of the U.P.'s action, I understood the expression of grim determination on the H.O.'s face. I looked at him quickly. He was still masticating. Growing wonder seemed to be taking the place of grim determination.

I knew now what had become of my red felt slippers. I had not been able to find them this morning.

"For heaven's sake, don't swallow!" I shouted.

Too late. The H.O. at that moment had given a great gulp. He looked at me interrogatively.

It was awkward—really, very awkward—to tell a man he has just eaten a piece of red felt slipper.

I do hate these explanations. If the U.P. hadn't been there I might have glossed it over. But with that fellow knowing what he did, I had to break my rule and—I

mean I had to tell the truth. The Twins shall pay for this.

I hurled the whole parcel of sandwiches out of the window. The H.O. irritated me then. He waited till I had done so, and then suggested that I ought to have looked at the sandwiches in case some of them were ham. Why couldn't the fool have thought of this before I threw them away?

Then I had another nice idea—my claret-cup. I would share my claret-cup with these people and thus dispel any slight awkwardness the sandwich incident may have caused.

A pint of claret-cup is no more than sufficient for one. I dismissed the thought as unworthy, and proffered the first cupful to the U.P. He waved it away churlishly, and I handed the cup to the other. He took it, of course.

"Your health, sir!" he roared genially, and emptied the cup at a single gulp. He looked at me strangely. Instead of handing me back the empty cup he let it drop, then with a

quick movment, snatched the Thermos from me.

"Don't drink," he said in a strangled voice, gave a kind of sob, and dashed out into the corridor.

For a moment I sat paralyzed with horror.

The U.P. gave a snort. The snort was fraught with sinister meaning.

"Charming children of yours," he said. "Red ink or something like that, no doubt. The man may die."

I stifled an impulse to wring the fellow's neck. I sprang to my feet and tottered after the victim. An icy fear clutched at my heart.

In a little while I saw him. He was still holding the Thermos. He held it out to me.

"I have emptied it," he said. He spoke quietly—so quietly that I was afraid.

"Are you—do you feel bad?" I faltered.

"It's all right," he replied. He seemed to speak with difficulty. "Don't you worry. It's—it's all over—*now*."

That was all he said. Not a word of reproach. I was touched by his forbearance — deeply touched. I told him so. He smiled wanly and pressed my hand. I feared he must have suffered.

"IT'S ALL RIGHT," HE REPLIED HE SEEMED TO SPEAK WITH DIFFICULTY

Just then the train pulled up at a wayside station. The H.O. got out. He looked pathetically pale, I thought, in the flicker of the solitary gas lamp. I had not the heart to point out to him that he was still clasping my Thermos. I felt uneasy about him. Was he making light of what had hap-

pened? What if he had drunk something worse, something more deadly, than red ink? What if he should die? I was afraid to ask, and yet—the train was beginning to move. Suspense is worse than certainty.

"Tell me—what was it?" I whispered.

"It was claret-cup," he replied gently.

CHAPTER VI

Visions

I AM hungry and thirsty—very hungry, very thirsty. But I am at peace. The Unpleasant Person, too, has left the train, and I am all alone. My Rest Cure has begun at last.

In less than an hour's time I shall be at Slocum. Slocum! The very name suggests repose.

I can picture it all—the Sunrise Arms, a comfortable, old-fashioned inn, such as Charles Dickens loved to paint, with roses and honeysuckle clambering about the porch and swallows and things nesting under the eaves.

Mine host and hostess beaming a welcome from the doorstep, their portly persons and round, rosy faces giving a happy promise of the comforts within.

How well I can picture the old-world parlor, with its cozy ingle-nook, its pewter tankards gleaming on the old oak dresser, its noble

galaxy of hams suspended from the time-blackened rafters, its cheery fire of fragrant logs blazing in the ancient fireplace.

And then the well-stocked larder, its shelves groaning with wholesome country fare—the home-made bread, milk fresh from the cow, eggs fresh from the hen, country butter from the Home Farm.

Dear, dear, it all makes me feel very hungry. What a meal I shall have when I get there! I mean to have the real, typical country supper—ham and eggs and coffee and slabs of home-made cake. There's nothing like the suppers one gets in these old-fashioned inns.

And, Lord, how I shall sleep to-night! I can picture my bedroom at the Sunrise Arms —spotless white muslin curtains, old-fashioned four-poster with feather-bed and snowy, lavender-scented sheets. Queen Elizabeth slept in it once, of course. A hobby of hers.

Ah! well, I shall sleep soundly and dreamlessly in my four-poster to-night.

I CAN PICTURE MY SURROUNDINGS AT THE SUNRISE ARMS

How delightful to be awakened in the morning by the song of the birds, followed (after a reasonable interval during which I go to sleep again) by the entrance of the neat-handed Hebe (bless her bonny, smiling face) with my bath-water and my early morning cup of tea.

Delightful to dawdle over my toilet, knowing that all the day is mine, with nothing whatever to do.

Nothing to do! Wonderful, blissful condition. Nothing to do but to contemplate the peaceful landscape—the sheep and cattle grazing on the hillside, waiting to be milked by the pretty, rosy-cheeked milkmaids.

Nothing to do but to stroll about the quiet country lanes, nothing to bother about, no one to talk to but the simple rustics, with their homely, restful ways.

Above everything, nothing to remind me of my arduous calling. No more tasks for the tired brain. No more jags for jaded nerves. Peace, perfect peace.

CHAPTER VII

The Way to Little Slocum

I HAVE arrived. I mention this because it is important. There were moments, here and there, when I did not expect to arrive.

There is no station of any sort at Little Slocum. Great Slocum is as far as one gets in the train. There are two ways of covering the ten miles between Great Slocum and Little Slocum. You can walk there, or else you can take the Only Conveyance. If you are a stranger to Little Slocum you take the Only Conveyance. If you have been to Little Slocum before you walk.

The Only Conveyance is referred to by the natives as "the wagonette." Wagonette is a euphemism. The Only Conveyance was once a wagon, a plain farmer's wagon, employed for conveying manure and other

dairy produce from the farm to the homestead. It is my private opinion, which must go no further, that in its off-days, when not conveying passengers between Great Slocum and Little Slocum, it still fulfills its original mission. Unless, of course, the subtle perfume that assailed my nostrils is the relic of bygone days. As the poet so beautifully expresses it—

"You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will,
But the scent of the roses will cling to it still."

I must say I was a little nervous when I saw the horse and driver of "the wagonette." William and Walter—those are their names, but for the moment I have forgotten which is which.

William and Walter are the two oldest inhabitants of Little Slocum. This fact is more wonderful than it appears at first sight. When I think of the number of journeys between Great Slocum and Little Slocum which they have managed to survive my admiration for William and Walter gives place to respectful awe.

The ten miles are what one might call choppy. They have their ups and downs. I found the downs more trying than the ups. The seat of the wagonette is not padded.

WILLIAM AND WALTER ARE THE TWO OLDEST INHABITANTS OF LITTLE SLOCUM

As far as I can make out, Walter (or is it William?) makes no attempt to drive. He leaves everything to William (or Walter). Perhaps he is wise, considering he is nearly blind and entirely deaf. But then so, I fancy, is William (or Walter).

Henceforth, to save time, I will decide that Walter is the driver and William is the

horse. If I am wrong I apologize to both parties.

Walter appears to trust William implicitly —so implicitly that he was fast asleep long before we had left Great Slocum behind. How he slept yet escaped destruction is a miracle. Had I not been slightly preoccupied on my own behalf I should certainly have endured agonies on Walter's account.

Walter is entirely bald. There is not a single hair upon his aged head. Very wisely Walter wears no cap. Even had he started with a cap he would certainly have arrived without one. No cap could remain long upon that highly glazed surface. And when Walter slumbers in his wagonette the angle at which his head falls forward upon his chest would certainly preclude the retention of any form of headgear.

Walter sits swaying and nodding upon his perch. His head sinks lower and lower. His neck assumes a dislocated appearance. The wagonette gives a frightful lurch; Walter continues to slumber and maintain his balance

miraculously. Every now and then his head drops so low, and the whole of him sways forward at so perilous an angle, that I feel sure his last hour is at hand. The wagonette strikes an obstacle and leaps six feet into the air. I clutch my seat, a cry of horror escapes me. Surely all is over with Walter. I have a vision of Walter pitched from his perilous perch—Walter lying limp by the roadside, with a broken neck. But no! Nothing of the kind happens to Walter. Instinctively, without so much as opening an eye, Walter recovers his center of gravity and goes on swaying and nodding.

Only once during that ten-mile drive did Walter wake up. That was when William mistook the ditch for the road. Walter woke up in the ditch. I don't think he would have done so then if William had not trodden on his face. Having trodden carefully on Walter's face with his fore feet and on my face with his hind feet, William lay down in the ditch.

I fancy he intended to spend the night there until he found out that there was water in the ditch. Then William changed his mind and tried to scramble out. But William was still attached to the wagonette—it acted as an anchor.

Just about this time I also discovered water in the ditch. I also tried to scramble out, less handicapped than William. I removed my face from under William's foot and left the ditch.

I found that Walter had done the same. Walter's face looked a little flat, but he seemed otherwise unmoved. Use is everything. It took us a good half-hour to disentangle William from the wagonette and restore both to their normal positions. Then Walter, remarking that this had broken the journey nicely, clambered to his seat and fell asleep again.

I am informed that the country between Great Slocum and Little Slocum is very beautiful, the scenery being full of surprises. The first surprise I got was the ditch.

After that nothing seemed to surprise me.

Besides, I could not pay very much attention to the scenery because my nose was bleeding. It bled rather hard.

I would have put a key down my back, but the only key I had on me was the key of my trunk. And, after all, I had not got it. My trunk is a self-locking trunk. These locks are a splendid invention providing one remembers not to leave the key at the bottom of the trunk. I never do remember. It is my invariable custom to pack everything on top of the key, close the trunk, and employ a locksmith at the end of the journey. This is the one thing I am thoroughly methodical over. I have never yet failed to pack the key at the bottom of my self-locking trunk.

I was a trifle dizzy from loss of blood, and there was a slight buzzing in my ears. As we approached the outskirts of Little Slocum the buzzing increased. It grew louder and louder. I became alarmed. I have had these

attacks of singing in my ears before, but never so acute an attack as this.

This was really rather like a weak brass band. And so persistent—the longest attack I had ever had, due, no doubt, to the loss of blood.

Yes, it was curiously like a brass band. And not so very weak either. A band playing music that seemed familiar somehow, yet illusive. At times it sounded almost like selections from the Bing Boys.

Strange how this nose-bleeding can affect one. And yet, after all, was it so very strange? Had I not heard those Bing Boys melodies night after night for months and months and months? Of course my head was full of them. It is lovely music, as everybody knows. I take off my hat to the composer. But—this is strictly *entre nous,* mind you—I am just a bit fed up with it.

I like the Bing Boys, of course. And I like the Bing Boys on Broadway. On Broadway! That's where I like them. I can't do with Bing Boys in my head. There is a time and a place for everything.

And this is a Rest Cure. Doctor's orders. To forget the Bing Boys—that is why I have come to Little Slocum.

Really the noise in my head is terrible. It is getting worse and worse. Anything more like a brass band—great heavens! why it *is* a brass band. It has been a brass band all along. A brass band on the village green. And undoubtedly they are playing selections from the Bing Boys.

Strange coincidence. A little unfortunate, I can't help thinking. To pilgrimage to this remote country village in order to forget the Bing Boys and to be greeted by the Bing Boys on my arrival! To do them justice, I will say this though—Little Slocum band are doing their very best to make the Bing Boys music sound as little like the Bing Boys music as possible. No hide-bound conventions about this band. No slavish regard for the notes as they are written.

Quite a pleasant change this from the Alhambra. And here let me whisper something: John Ansell is just a leetle meticulous.

He insists on getting every note in every night. Result: monotony, lack of excitement. You always know just what you're going to get. The expected always happens. This is a mistake. What is it Shakespeare says about the charm of variety? I forget exactly what he says, but I quite agree with him. And it's the same with music as with everything else. An occasional bloomer relieves the dullness of the thing. It makes people sit up and take notice.

Little Slocum band are aware of this. And so the printed music does not worry them. What they aim at is just a bold impression —nothing niggling. As many of the notes as can be conveniently got in, and if you can't reach your C's and E's, why, don't fret. Just blow off a few F's and A's and they'll fill up the gap quite nicely.

CHAPTER VIII

I Arrive

I am glad my nose had stopped bleeding by the time I had to reply to the Mayor's speech. Even without this distraction it is difficult to reply suitably to a speech of which you have been unable to catch a single word.

The reason I did not catch the Mayor's speech was that the band continued to play all the time.

I did not realize at first that the Mayor was speaking to me, for he never once looked at me. He looked alternatively at the sky and at a piece of paper in his hand. He threw his head very far back to look at the sky and very far forward to look at the piece of paper, and so I never saw his face. But I felt sure it was a kind face. The man who can go on patiently making a speech to the incidental

music of Little Slocum band is bound to have a kind face.

The village green was unexpectedly crowded. I had noticed that when we were still some little distance away. All Little Slocum seemed gathered upon the green, including the Boy Scouts, the Fire Brigade, and the Village Idiot.

Modest as I am, I could not help observing that my arrival was causing a great deal of interest. But it was not until the band paused to take breath and the Mayor finished speaking, not until the Village Idiot climbed up on to the wagonette, hit me cordially between the shoulder-blades, addressed me as "good old George," and started a cheer taken up with gratifying enthusiasm by the Boy Scouts, the Fire Brigade, and Chorus of Prominent Citizens, it was not until then that I realized that this was Little Slocum's welcome to *me*.

All this pageantry—Band, Mayor, Boy Scouts, Fire Brigade—all this was solely in *my* honor.

I was deeply touched. I hope I made a creditable speech. I earnestly hope so. I am not quite sure what I said. I felt a trifle dizzy and shaken, but I derived great support from the Village Idiot.

THE VILLAGE IDIOT

The Village Idiot has formed an attachment for me. In fact he has scarcely left my side. He stood at my elbow while I replied to the Mayor, applauded heartily and frequently, jabbed me in the ribs, called me "good old George," and supplied the missing word for me whenever I hesitated for an instant. I don't think it was always exactly the word I had intended. The Village Idiot has one innocent weakness—a partiality for polysyllabic words, irrespective of their mean-

ing. I seem to remember something of this sort:—

GEORGE: Mr. Mayor, ladies and gentlemen——

VILLAGE IDIOT: Hear, hear! Good old George! (*Claps* GEORGE *enthusiastically upon the back.*)

GEORGE (*recovering from a slight unsteadiness*): I am greatly flattered by your kind and—er—er——

V. I. (*loudly and clearly*): Salubrious.

GEORGE (*hurriedly*): Welcome. (*Frantic applause from Village Idiot.*) I may say this is a most delightful surprise to me.

V. I.: Good old George! (*A Boy Scout starts a tentative cheer, hesitates, and stops, overcome with shyness.*)

GEORGE: But you do me too much honor. I don't deserve all this—all this—this——

V. I. (*as before*): Plenipotentiary.

GEORGE: I have heard a great deal about your charming village, and I may say that I am looking forward with tremendous—er—tremendous——

V. I.: Juxtaposition.

GEORGE: To making its closer acquaintance.

At this point my memory grows confused. I believe I spoke at some length. The collaboration of the Village Idiot was encouraging, if slightly bewildering. Presently I cast about me for a neat and rapid conclusion, something to the effect that, though my words might be brief they came straight from the heart. I got as far as "Mr. Mayor, ladies and gentlemen,—I am unable to make a long speech" (frantic applause from the Village Idiot), when the neat and rapid conclusion came to me unsought, without effort or volition on my part.

It came to me in this wise. At the moment when the Village Idiot ceased applauding and I was about to continue, the aged Walter awoke from a deep sleep. He awoke just sufficiently to realize that William was standing still—he did not awake sufficiently to grasp the reason why William was standing still.

"Drat the owd hoss, the devil's in 'un!" cries Walter, and applies his whip with unexpected energy across the startled William's back.

William bounds forward. The Village Idiot, unbalanced by the suddenness of the maneuver, is about to take a header on to the greensward, but saves himself by clasping me round the neck. With great presence of mind I sit down upon the floor of the wagonette, thus saving two lives at one go. In this wise we proceed to the Sunrise Arms, followed by the cheers of Little Slocum.

CHAPTER IX

The Sunrise Arms

I am a little disappointed. The Sunrise Arms is not very Dickensian, after all.

Roses and honeysuckle do not clamber about the porch in wild confusion, or in any other way. As a matter of fact there is no porch. The architecture of the place is not the porchy style.

There are no gables. The swallow season does not seem to have begun. If it has, I am sorry for the birds. There is not a single eave for them to nest in.

The bar-parlor, too, is a bit of a stunner. It has not got an ingle-nook, nor an ancient fire-place, nor pewter tankards, nor blackened, hammy rafters. Only spittoons.

Mine host and hostess are not Dickensian either. They go with the horsehair furniture. They are thin. They do not smile.

There is about them an air of settled gloom.

MY HOST AND HOSTESS

I could forgive all this if only their larder were a little more in the Dickens vein.

It was a bit of a blow to find that I have

not brought my ration-book away with me. No meat without coupons at the Sunrise Arms.

And there is no fish in Little Slocum. Nothing but a tin of sardines. At least there *was* a tin of sardines. I have eaten them.

I asked for new-laid eggs. There are no new-laid eggs in Little Slocum. All the eggs are sent to London as fast as the hens of Little Slocum can arrange to lay them.

I asked for milk fresh from the cow. I received a tin of Nestlé's. All the fresh milk of Little Slocum goes where the fresh eggs go.

I asked for a modicum of butter. They brought me a dab of margarine. Where is the butter from the Home Farm? Gone with the eggs and the milk.

I have eaten a tin of sardines and a loaf of bread. I have drunk coffee essence and Nestlé's. I wish I had not done so. It is wrong to make a god of one's stomach. I realize this now, as I write, in the small hours of the morning.

True, I did invite the Village Idiot and the Mayor to share with me, but they refused.

The Village Idiot read out the name on the tin—"The Angel brand"—and the Mayor said he was not hungry and the Village Idiot said his mother was expecting him to tea.

A charming man, the Mayor. A heart of gold. He arrived at the second sardine and stayed long after I had finished picking the tin.

He said that we had parted a little abruptly on the green. Sooner than he had anticipated —in fact, before he had had time to reply to my reply to his speech.

I could see he felt this very keenly—that he was anxious to reply to my reply.

What could I do? I am not a hard man. I hate to disappoint people.

I did what the Mayor was hoping I should do. I insisted on his replying to my reply.

The Village Idiot is at times a little tactless. No sooner had the Mayor begun than

the Village Idiot turned on the gramophone in the bar-parlor (selection from "The Bing Boys").

That was the reason why, for the second time, I failed to catch the Mayor's speech in its entirety.

But this much I have gathered: The inhabitants of Little Slocum intend to make my stay amongst them as pleasant as possible. To that end they have arranged a program of "events" for every day of the week.

The program for the first week is in my possession. The Mayor has had it written out for me in beautiful copperplate. A heart of gold. He handed it to me (the program), and I read:—

FRIDAY

3.30 *p.m.*—Arrival of Mr. Robey. Band on the village green. Reception by Mayor and prominent citizens. Speech of welcome by Mayor. Mr. Robey proceeds to his hotel.

4.30–6.30—Rest and refreshment.

6.45.—Band of Hope concert in the Drill Hall. Mr. Robey will be asked to address a few words to the audience.

SATURDAY

Morning.—Aquatic sports and water carnival on the lake.

Afternoon.—Aquatic sports prize distribution. Mr. Robey will be invited to give away the prizes.

Evening.—Sewing-Bee of Little Slocum Mothers. Mr. Robey will be requested to entertain the workers.

SUNDAY

Early service, 7 a.m.

Matins at 11. The Vicar will ask Mr. Robey to read the lessons.

Sunday School at 3 p.m. Mr. Robey will be invited to say a few words to the children.

Lantern-slide lecture at 7.30. Mr. Robey will be asked to lecture on "The Childhood of Noah."

MONDAY

Morning.—9 a.m., plowing contest between Mr. Robey and the Mayor; 10 *a.m.,* Baby Show. Judges: Mr. Robey and the Vicar's aunt.

Afternoon.—Gymkhana on the green.

Evening.—Progressive whist drive and hat trimming competition. Adjudicators: Mr. Robey and Mrs. Clutterbuck.

At this point I began to feel a little faint. The Mayor saw that I was deeply moved—overwhelmed by the splendor of the program. Pressing my hand sympathetically and remarking that I should just have nice time to unpack and dress for the Band of Hope concert, the kind man took his leave.

The Village Idiot did not accompany the Mayor. He continued to accompany me. Did Mary really like her little lamb to go "everywhere that Mary went," I wonder?

The Village Idiot helped me to unpack. It was beautiful to see his innocent pleasure in

THE VILLAGE IDIOT HELPED ME TO UNPACK

my humble belongings—to watch him brush his hair with my clothes-brush and his clothes with my hair-brush, try on my

pajamas and golf stockings and sample my shaving soap and my brilliantine.

That reminds me—I must get some more brilliantine. It was a stupid bottle, anyway. If you held it up by the cork the cork was sure to come out. Really, I couldn't blame the Village Idiot. But I wish it had dropped on to shirts, or something washable of that sort, instead of my new Norfolk suit.

Brilliantine is so cloying. So is marmalade. Is marmalade bad for doeskin gloves? Anyway, I am afraid doeskin gloves are bad for marmalade. These two things should be kept separate if possible. I must ask the wife to be more careful next time. How did the gloves get into the marmalade? Insufficient packing, no doubt, but there is no time to brood over such matters. It is time to start for the Band of Hope concert. The Village Idiot says so. I hastily dab my hair with my Norfolk suit and follow my guide to the Drill Hall.

CHAPTER X

Muscular Christianity

That Band of Hope concert! It will long remain in my memory for more reasons than one.

I had not meant to be funny at the Band of Hope concert. I have come to Little Slocum in order to be serious. I must try to impress this upon the inhabitants. This is a Rest Cure. I am to be entirely unfunny, to be my own natural self, for three blessed weeks. Little Slocum must learn to accept me in this spirit.

The audience at the Drill Hall are clearly laboring under a misapprehension. Perhaps it was my fault. Perhaps I should have warned the organizers of the concert that I was not going to be funny.

These amiable people are anxious to help me in every way. They are determined to

afford me every facility for being funny. With kindly forethought they have stretched a piece of string across my path. I trip over the string as I mount the platform. Thus they obtain for me a hearty burst of laughter.

On the platform I am introduced to the Vicar's daughters. I shake hands. I murmur: "How d'you do?" At this there is another burst of laughter from the simple rustics. They appear to think that I have made a witty sally.

The Vicar's daughters appear to think so too. So does the Vicar.

All this, of course, is due to the false impression created by my entrance. From the moment of my entrance Little Slocum has decided to accept me whole-heartedly as being funny. I have but to murmur "Thank you," and the Vicar's daughters begin to burble, the Vicar smiles politely. I have but to glance at the audience and they are instantly convulsed with mirth.

I learn from the Vicar that I am expected to open the entertainment with a short speech.

Now is my opportunity to correct this misapprehension about myself. I will speak seriously to these good people; I will tell them that I have come into their midst not as a comedian but as a man.

I will make it clear to them once and for all that this is no laughing matter, but a rest cure.

I begin my speech in the customary manner, "Ladies and gentlemen." Nothing could be more sedate, more serious. A shriek of merriment from the audience.

I endeavor to convey by facial expression that this is not what I had expected. In vain. My facial expression is a wash-out. The laughter does not wane. It waxes.

I give my face a rest. I try gesture—dignified, commanding gesture that cannot fail to be arresting. No use. Gesture is a fresh impetus to laughter.

In despair I turn from the audience. I appeal to the dignitaries upon the platform. They are smiling, grinning, chortling—positively egging on the audience.

A SHRIEK OF MERRIMENT FROM THE AUDIENCE

I must wait. I must be patient. There is no other way.

The laughter subsides at last. In a measure the audience composes itself. At length I am able to continue.

I choose, advisedly, a simple, conventional phrase: "It gives me great pleasure to appear before you this evening." Thereupon the audience shouts with mirth.

I wait, sans facial expression or gesture, until the mirth dies down. I then resume: "The Vicar has asked me to say a few words." Howls of laughter.

"You must forgive me if those words are brief." Yells of delight.

"Because I am not feeling very well." Loud laughter and cheers.

I realize that Little Slocum has not understood. I must be more explicit.

This time I wait until silence has been completely restored. I wait a long time. There is an expectant pause. I begin to speak, slowly and impressively:

"Ladies and gentlemen" (a short burst of laughter).

"I assure you I am not joking." (I feel the audience are impressed at last. I continue, more naturally):

"As a matter of fact, I have been working too hard." (Loud guffaws from all parts of the house.) I must be still more explicit.

"Ladies and gentlemen" (by speaking at terrific speed I manage to nip another outbreak of merriment in the bud), "I assure you this is serious. I have come here to-night not as a comedian but as a human being." (Protracted haw-haws.)

"The doctors tell me I am on the verge of a nervous breakdown, therefore I——" The remainder of the speech is drowned in cheers and laughter.

It is more difficult than I had imagined to make Little Slocum accept the truth. Words have failed me. I determine to convey by pantomime what I have failed to convey by words.

Here follows, though I say it myself, a really

artistic rendering of incipient nervous breakdown. I sway, I smile a pale smile, I stagger a little, I pass my hand with a distraught and slightly pathetic gesture across my forehead, I steady myself with an effort—a hush falls upon the house. At last Little Slocum is beginning to understand.

Once more that pale smile (suffering, bravely borne), and I collapse into the chair some one has placed for me.

I collapse—I collapse thoroughly. So does the chair. Little Slocum shrieks with joy.

Bruised and shaken, I scramble to my feet. The chair rises up and hits me somewhere. I do not remember where. I have not sorted out the bruises. They are various, from various sources.

The house yells with laughter. I am far funnier than they had expected. Every one is delighted. My reputation as a humorist is now firmly established beyond dispute. Those that had been inclined to doubt are now convinced. The chair has settled the point. I owe much to the chair.

I am introduced to the inventor and maker of the chair. The Village Genius. "I knew this here chair 'ud git yew a laugh," the Village Genius tells me, and I thank him warmly.

I realize that it is no use fighting against the inevitable. I resign myself to being funny for the evening. Only for the evening. I must postpone my rest cure for a few hours longer. To-morrow I shall make my position clear.

Some one pushes a program into my hands. The program informs me that a pianoforte *duel* by the Misses Sparkins is now in progress. I agree with the printer.

The next item on the program is a glee—"Sweet and Low"—by members of the choir. I observe that three of the artistes are frock-coated, while the fourth—do my eyes deceive me, or is this elegant stranger in real evening dress, brown boots (new), and genuine cut-glass diamond studs the size of pigeon's eggs—is this really my old pal Walter, yel-

low-gloved, highly polished, and actually awake?

A closer scrutiny assures me that it is indeed Walter. Ancient and wonderful man! A whisper from the Vicar; Walter's falsetto is quite unique, he tells me. I agree with the Vicar.

The entertainment proceeds with delightful smoothness.

A cornet solo—"The Rosary"—by the Vicar's youngest son. The lad pays me rather a graceful compliment. Instead of blowing at the audience in the customary manner, he stands sideways upon the platform and blows at me. It is a little draughty, but gratifying. And I don't think my eardrum is perforated, after all. It was my imagination. All I was suffering from was shock.

The Vicar's son establishes a precedent. Henceforth all the artistes address their performance exclusively to me and ignore the audience.

I am afraid I made a slight *faux-pas* during

the evening. That recitation by the Vicar was dramatic, not comic. I wish I had realized this a little earlier on instead of laughing so heartily during the first five stanzas of the poem.

I was surprised when the child is taken ill in the sixth stanza. I realized my mistake when it gets worse in the seventh stanza, and was overcome with remorse when it actually dies in the eighth, ninth and tenth, after saying beautiful things and converting everybody all round.

Everybody in the poem except the child seemed to be in need of conversion. Never have I known so many convertible people concentrated in one spot.

The child's father is converted and refrains from strangling the child's mother.

That about-to-be-strangled lady is converted and refrains from eloping with a gentleman friend.

That gentleman friend is converted and loses all desire to elope with any person or persons whatsoever.

131208B

The child's grandparents, brothers and sisters, uncles, faithful servants and others, are converted from a miscellaneous assortment of vices, including, if I remember rightly, inebriation, petty larceny, and inappropriate reference to words of a religious character.

The doctor and the nurse are converted in a general kind of a way. The poet is a little vague here, but gives us to understand that, whatever may have been the character of the nurse and doctor *before* the child's death, they are entirely satisfactory *afterwards.*

It is all very sad and beautiful. I wish I had not made that mistake at first. I even went out of my way to laugh because nobody else was laughing and I thought the Vicar would be hurt. I am sorry.

But the program ought to have been more explicit. It was the Vicar's personality that misled me. When a rather corpulent, elderly gentleman assumes the voice and general demeanor of childhood, the

audience should be warned that the child is going to die later on.

I enjoyed the classical dance by the Vicar's daughters. It was classical in the best sense of the word. No one could have accused it of being either immodest or exhilarating.

IT WAS THE VICAR'S PERSONALITY THAT MISLED ME

A carping critic, perhaps, might have pointed out that the Vicar's daughters were a trifle over-draped. Butter muslin. The Vicar's daughters were swathed in butter muslin from top to toe. Illimitable yards of it were wound round and round every available portion of the Vicar's daughters. All traces of figure, if any, were thus effectually and modestly concealed.

It is possible, of course, that excess of butter muslin may have hampered their movements a little. But bold movements, frivolous steps, would surely have been out of place. The Vicar's daughters swayed about in a high-class and ladylike manner very pleasing to behold.

I was a little afraid at one time of the attitude of the Village Idiot towards this item on the program. The reason I have refrained from mentioning the Village Idiot for so long is that hitherto his conduct has been irreproachable. Seated among the audience in the center of the front row, he has remained silent and motionless, lost, apparently, in contemplation of the gas-chandelier suspended over the platform.

But the classical dancing of the Vicar's daughters rouses him from his trance-like condition. He withdraws his gaze from the chandelier and glues it instead upon the Vicar's daughters. He beats time to the music for a while with feet and hands. Then, with a rapt expression upon his face, he rises to his feet and begins to imitate the

modestly alluring movements of the Vicar's daughters.

I cannot help feeling a little apprehensive. There are moments, it appears to me, when the Village Idiot's performance comes perilously near to being a travesty. But no one takes the slightest notice of the Village Idiot. The audience, no doubt, are entranced, spellbound by the grace of the Vicar's daughters; the Vicar's daughters are intent upon their pleasing task. Fluttering butter muslin holds the stage. Besides, Little Slocum is probably accustomed to anything the Village Idiot might do.

The Vicar's daughters flutter and smile themselves into the background amidst terrific applause, are obliged to smile and flutter themselves forward again in response to repeated calls, and finally subside into their seats behind the proud and beaming Vicar. Whereupon the Village Idiot transfers his gaze to the chandelier again and resumes his trance-like condition.

It was a happy thought of the committee's to introduce variety into the program by a

display of the Y.W.C.A. Drill Class. Dumb-bell and Indian club exercises. Muscular Christianity, so to say.

The Y.W.C.A. Drill Class are untrammeled by butter muslin. Their evolutions are bold and free—a shade too bold and free, perhaps, for the size of the platform.

Had the committee foreseen the amount of space required by dumb-bell and club exercises I do not think they would have remained upon the platform. Neither should I have remained. Whenever the Christian young woman nearest to me makes a lunge with her dumb-bell I am hit somewhere. The exercises vary, and I am unable to foretell accurately where I shall be hit next. It is interesting but unnerving.

Indian clubs are even more interesting. They take up more room than dumb-bells, and they are apt to fly out of the Christian young woman's hand.

I think it is a flying club that stuns me. Only momentarily. I recover sufficiently to walk home, accompanied by the Village Idiot and a splitting headache.

CHAPTER XI

Not All Lavender

The Village Idiot disappears unobtrusively. The headache remains.

Bed! Bed will be very good. Though, after all, it is not a four-poster, it will be good. I am dog-tired and my head is splitting.

A moment later I am in my pyjamas, I blow out my candle, I slip into bed. At least—no: I *try* to slip into bed. I cannot do so.

There is something wrong with the bed. Half-way down my feet encounter an inhospitable resistance—a wall of sheet. I push and struggle. The sheet declines to budge.

I relight the candle. I investigate. My head is buzzing abominably. I thought so: an apple-pie bed. In very bad taste. Whose taste? The chambermaid's? I have not seen her yet. A bit of a nut, no doubt.

Stay! I have it. I wronged the chambermaid. The Village Idiot, of course. He was in my room alone this afternoon long enough to do the accursed deed. I shall have things to say to him. No wonder he disappeared so unobtrusively just now.

Meanwhile I must summon what strength remains to me and take the bed to pieces. Dear me, what a head! I shall be better after a good night's rest.

The mattress looks a little lumpy. (There is no feather-bed and the sheets do not smell of lavender.)

There are foreign substances under the mattress. I am glad I thought of turning it. I remove the coal-hammer, a child's tin bucket and spade, and a portion of sewing-machine. I carefully replace the sheets and blanket. "And so to bed."

I put that in inverted commas because I believe a fellow called Pepys wrote it before I did. I don't suppose anybody ever reads his diary. Still, it's only fair to mention it —I like to be perfectly fair and above-

board. Pepys anticipated me—that was his luck.

The bed is very small. Queen Elizabeth could not have slept in it. Presently I begin to wonder whether anybody could ever have slept in it. It is too short. You cannot lie straight in it. If you do, your feet stick out or else your head sticks out. You please yourself about that. It is too narrow. You cannot curl up in it. If you do, your knees stick out or else your—in short, the bed is too narrow.

I blow out my candle and try to sleep. The mattress is very uneven. Perhaps it was a mistake to remove the bucket and spade, the hammer and the sewing-machine. Perhaps the mattress fits better with these things. Perchance a thoughtful chambermaid placed them there to fill up the hollows and reduce the hillocks. I try to fit myself into the mattress—to make my hollows fit the hillocks of the mattress and my hillocks fit the hollows of the mattress. In vain. Nothing seems to correspond.

The moon shines in upon me. I have forgotten to pull down the blind. Impossible to sleep with moonbeams on one's face.

I get out of bed once more to pull down the blind. (N.B.—Less strength of mind is required to get out of this bed than out of any other.)

There is no blind. I drape my dressing-gown across the window and retire once more to rest.

To rest! Perhaps. I am very sleepy. The hollows and hillocks grow less significant. I begin to drowse.

Somewhere a door starts banging. I lie listening and waiting—listening for the bang, waiting for some one to put a stop to it. No one does.

The door goes on banging. Why doesn't some one put a stop to it? Some one ought to shut that door. What is worse than a banging door in the dead of night? Nothing. A rattling window is not a patch on it.

Bang! That dull, expressionless, irritating

bang. Why doesn't some one get up and shut the dashed door? Whose door is it, anyway? Why does not the owner of the door get up and shut it instead of permitting it to lacerate my nerves?

I reflect bitterly that this is a Rest Cure. Bang! Good Lord, will no one shut the damned door? Bad enough when one is in a state of perfect health, but—bang! This is more than flesh and blood can stand. I leap out of bed. I light my candle once again. I step out into the corridor.

Where is the devilish, diabolical door? Ha! By its infernal bang I locate it. It is the door of the room at the end of the corridor. Good! I will close it gently but firmly, and so peace shall descend upon the night.

My hand is upon the door-knob. Gently I pull to the door. Unexpected resistance from the other side. An unseen agency is pulling against me. The door yields and opens from within.

I am face to face with some one lightly at-

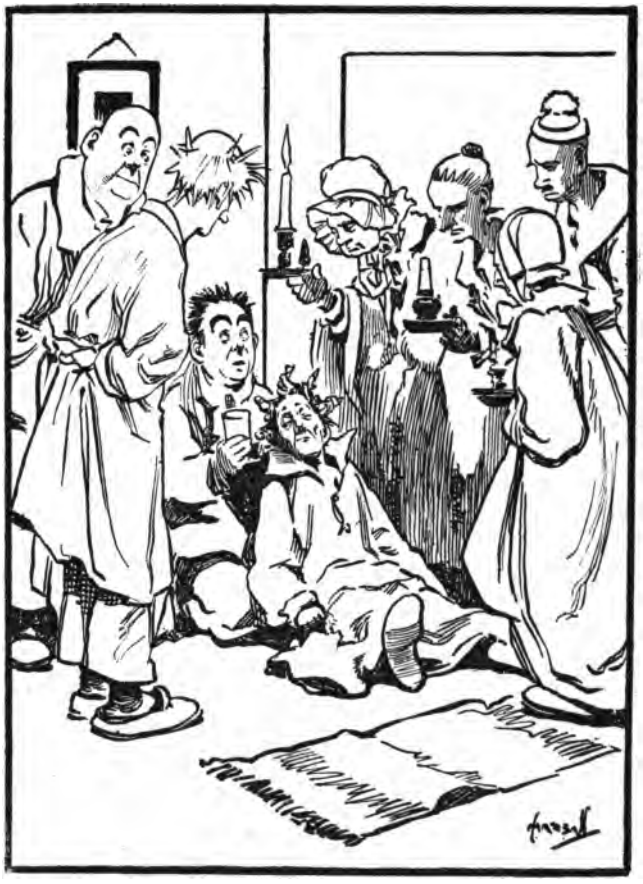
tired. A lady—lightly attired, did I say? Let me rather say attired for the night. Thoroughly attired in something pink and flanneletty. A single garment, but good hard-wearing stuff. This much I gather by candle-light.

The lady, no doubt, is startled. But no more startled, surely, than I. My pyjamas are of a quiet pattern. Quiet and *distingué*—the ticket in the window said so. And the ticket was right.

I maintain the lady was not justified in what she did. A gasp or two, perhaps, but she need not have fainted dead away upon the carpet. It was a tactless thing to do. It showed great want of consideration.

It did not seem to occur to her how this kind of thing might jeopardize my reputation. It would have served her right if I had left her gasping and fainting upon the carpet.

I am too tender-hearted. And I suffer for it. I should not have paused to go to the washstand and sprinkle the tooth-glass over



A HOUSE IN DÉSHABILLE—EVERY VARIETY OF DÉSHABILLE

her face. Water from the tooth-glass. It revived her, it brought her round. It gave her strength—a little too much strength. Less would have served to rouse the house.

A house roused by screams of an ear-piercing, almost unearthly, quality. A house in *déshabille*—every variety of *déshabille*.

Déshabille swarms and circles about us. *Déshabille* flops and flutters.

Flannelette, pink and rampant, ministers to flannelette, pink and prostrate.

Waterproofs and pyjamas proffer assistance. The old-fashioned night-shirt hovers in the background.

Déshabille places the worst construction upon my presence. It is very awkward. I never was good at explanations, especially in the middle of the night. And in pyjamas! And these simple rustics are so slow to grasp innocence; guilt is so much simpler. And truth always sounds so unconvincing.

I consider that the cause of all this trouble (I refer to the lady, not the door) has behaved most unreasonably throughout. Firstly, by

fainting; secondly, by shrieking; and thirdly, by the way she received my explanation.

I assured her that my intentions had been strictly honorable. At first she absolutely and flatly refused to believe this. When I *did* manage to convince her at last, she seemed more annoyed than ever.

These are trying moments. And the night is getting chilly. I would like to go back to bed. Will these people *never* listen to reason?

With the eloquence of despair I repeat my story—the story of the banging door. I tell it to them in simple, moving words. Let them take it or leave it, I can do no more.

This time they listen; they look at the lady, they are convinced at last. Innocence prevails. Even the old-fashioned night-shirt ceases to doubt and retires, disappointed, whence it came. Every one retires. I retire. The incident is closed.

CHAPTER XII

Good Night

Once more I try to compose myself to sleep.

During the hour that follows I reconstruct a number of preconceived ideas.

Among others, I reconstruct the idea about the soothing sights and sounds of the peaceful countryside. And I come to the following conclusions:—

(*a*) That the cooing of the dove has been considerably over-rated by the poets.

(*b*) That the cock crows not only at break of day but also in the middle of the night.

(*c*) That cows either do not sleep at night or else they talk in their sleep.

(*d*) That the donkey is stone-deaf and the frog has practically no ear for music either.

(*e*) That cats are even more so in the country.

(*f*) That there are also dogs.

(*g*) That the couple in the adjoining room are accustomed to rural sounds, for they are sleeping. I can hear them sleeping.

But I am very tired. In spite of the bed in which Queen Elizabeth did not sleep; in spite of the cooing of the dove, the crowing of the cock, the lowing of the cow, the braying of the donkey, the croaking of the frog, the caterwauling of the cat and the barking of the dog; in spite of the snoring of the couple next door, I fall asleep at last.

I sleep, but not for long. My dreams are troubled by the sounds that haunt the peaceful countryside. Do animals in the country *never* seek repose? Do they *never* stop cooing, crowing, lowing and the rest? I seem to hear The Raven, pessimistically quoting.

Instead of growing fainter the symposium of sounds increases. It increases maddeningly. It increases so that I seem to feel as well as to hear it.

I am buffeted by noise; I am tumbled and

knocked about by it. Rest in such pandemonium is impossible. Yet rest is what I am here for. Rest is what I need.

I crave rest. The craving becomes intolerable. The noise becomes intolerable. At all costs I must put a stop to the noise.

I am lashed to a frenzy. Indignant, furious, frenzied, I leap out of bed. I leap down the stairs. I leap out of the house.

Some one follows me. Some one is at my heels. It is the lady of the banging door. —I know her by her attire—pink and flanneletty.

Somehow, I am not surprised, though perhaps I ought to have been.

The Pink One seems to understand, to share my desires. No doubt she, too, is unaccustomed to the soothing sounds of the countryside.

She feels as I do. All misunderstanding is at an end between us. We are at one, not only on the subject of banging doors, but also regarding cooing doves, croaking frogs and all the rest. There is a bond between us. The

TOGETHER, HAND IN HAND, WE LEAVE THE HOUSE

bond of an overmastering desire to exterminate these sounds.

Together, hand in hand, we leave the house. We run amok in the moonlit meadow.

Her forty years, or maybe forty-five, sit lightly upon her. Her agility is marvelous. So, by the way, is mine. We leap and climb and run. We perform strange rites by moonlight. We lassoo and we gag the cow. We ram tin pails over the head of the cat. We tie mufflers across the mouth of the dog and the donkey. We choke the frogs in their own pond. In short, success crowns our efforts all along the line.

I am elated, triumphant, and I know that Flannelette shares my feelings.

Gamboling like two-year-olds, hand in hand we speed back to the house. How peaceful is the countryside, how—hark! What was that? What raucous, sawing sound is this that yet disturbs the stillness of the night, that seems to mock our efforts—Flannelette's and mine?

In the corridor outside my door we pause and listen. In a flash I remember. For the sake of Flannelette I stifle the exclamation of a maledictory nature that rushes to my lips. Questioningly, she turns to me.

"The couple next door," I whisper hoarsely, "snoring adverbially."

Flannelette's grip upon my hand tightens. She regards me fixedly. I regard her fixedly. Without a word, she hands me one of the two or three revolvers concealed in the pink folds of her garment.

We understand one another. There is but one thing to be done, and that speedily. The snorers must be shot. Of course. We must shoot the snorers. Then they will snore no more. It is very simple.

Hand in hand we enter their room. Hand in hand we shoot them. Our surmise was correct—they cease to snore. The experiment is entirely successful.

Out in the corridor Flannelette and I congratulate one another heartily. Somewhere a

band is playing (selection from "The Bing Boys").

Flannelette bursts into song. I join her. Together we sing "If I were the Only Girl in the World."

I am strangely exalted. So is Flannelette. At the conclusion of the first verse she throws herself upon my neck, weeping joyously.

I notice that her tears are very damp. I push her gently into a chair and mop my face.

I go on mopping my face. The sensation of dampness continues.

Flannelette fades from my consciousness. The sense of discomfort becomes acute. Darkness descends upon me. I am in bed.

My ear detects a grating, sawing sound from beyond the partition wall. The couple in the next room! After all, then, Flannelette and I had missed them. Or, at any rate, we had not shot them thoroughly.

Most annoying. Now we should have to start all over again. Really it was most—good Lord! great Scott! Heavens above!

What thoughts are these? Dreams? This gamboling in the meadows, this shooting, this pink flannelette?

A dream—nothing but a dream? At least the flannelette was real. So was that banging door, so was the crowd, the scene, all the infernal hubbub.

But afterwards? A dream. Fantastic and sanguinary. Sanguinary! A dream, of course. And yet—still that sensation of dampness, of something trickling down upon my face! Great heavens! Can it be——? No, no—not that! Not blood. The shooting was a dream.

And yet—I have heard of strange things done in dreams. Merciful heaven!

I am wide awake. With hands that tremble I strike a light. Cold shivers down my spine! Cold shivers—I admit it without shame.

An unknown something that trickled, trickled down upon my face. Who would not have shivered?

No, not blood. Water! Slightly soapy

water, trickling through the ceiling. The explanation, doubtless, is in the room above. Who knows? An overturned basin, a leaky bath perchance. I am too exhausted to worry about whys and wherefores. The reaction is terrible.

I move my bed and put a pail to catch the drips. And so in the early gray of the morning I fall into a peaceful, dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

Sybil

My sleep lasts perhaps five minutes. No more. Possibly less. It is still the early gray of the morning.

I awake because some one is shaking me. Shaking me rather violently.

It is the Maid of the Inn, bearing the early morning—the early gray of the morning—cup of tea.

Perhaps I should not have written "Maid" of the Inn, for she is a wife—the wife of the oldest inhabitant. I am referring to Walter.

I learn these details presently. At the moment I am conscious only of a vague sense of loss, of disappearance, of something I haven't got.

I have had the feeling once or twice since yesterday. The first glimpse of the Sunrise Arms, the first glimpse of my landlord, the first glimpse of the spittoons.

And now it is Hebe of my dreams who disappears.

As she takes her thumb out of the tea-cup and pours in the slops from the saucer the Maid of the Inn or Wife of the Oldest Inhabitant—in future I shall call her Sybil for short, though Sybil may not be her name—Sybil is struck by my appearance.

She is struck by my resemblance to her second cousin's husband when he was sickening for the small-pox. All mottled, he looked, and all mottled I look, says Sybil.

I tell her I feel mottled. I have had a mottling night. I hope I was not terse with Sybil. But she annoyed me. She was tactless. To tell a man he looks as if he were sickening for the small-pox!

But I must not be unjust. I must be fair to Sybil. She was actuated by no desire to annoy. On the contrary, Sybil was out to please. The subtle flattery of her next remark showed this to be the case.

The deceased second cousin by marriage, Sybil assured me, made a lovely corpse. I

was really very like him, it seemed, not only about the mottles, but in every other respect. She would bring his photograph to show me. I hoped he had it taken before he became a corpse. She would also bring me a photograph of his grave. Decidedly, Sybil's one desire was to please.

He didn't suffer long, poor fellow. He was took bad on the Sunday and they buried him on the following Wednesday.

Sybil has a wonderful memory. The mortuary information at her command would shame a medical dictionary. Sybil imparted it all to me with a wealth of detail.

I felt more and more mottled every moment. I enquired the time of Sybil. I admit it was a ruse. My watch was under my pillow.

The ruse was successful. Sybil changed the conversation. The time, she informed me, was half-past four, and the reason she had called me was that I might get up and see the sun rise. Little Slocum was famous for its sunrises. Strangers who came to

Little Slocum invariably rose to see the sun rise.

I wished Little Slocum had been famous for some other thing instead—Banbury cakes or Paisley shawls or something.

Sybil said that if I was going to have the small-pox she was glad she had called me early, so that I might see the sun rise before I got worse.

She implied that, having seen the sun of Little Slocum rise, I should, no doubt, die happy.

She added, as I drank my tea, that tea was bad for small-pox, but that perhaps it would not make a great deal of difference. What was to be, was to be. Whereupon she regarded me sympathetically for a moment, shook her head, and departed with my empty cup. From her manner I gather that my approaching demise is only a question of time.

Well, I *do* feel pretty bad. When Sybil had gone I leapt out of bed. Leaping out of bed is becoming a habit with me here.

I leapt in the direction of the looking-glass.

Yes, I certainly look ghastly. I feel ghastly. What does it feel like to be sickening for small-pox? I wish I had remembered to ask Sybil. She is sure to know.

But I don't believe I do feel small-poxy. It's not that kind of a feeling at all. Sybil said I looked like her cousin. Absurd! All nonsense! And yet these old country people sometimes know a lot about illness. They make a study of it. They never have a doctor. Herbs and all that kind of thing.

I don't feel well enough to see the sun rise. I don't want to see the beastly sun rise, anyway; what I want is sleep. That's what's the matter with me.

I go back to bed. It is only five o'clock, but I cannot sleep. Impossible to sleep after that strong cup of tea.

All this doddering talk of Sybil's about small-pox. What nonsense. Naturally, I look ill. Considering all I've been through. Anyway, I am not at all sleepy. But I

won't see the sun rise—I won't see the sun rise and die happy. Not for Sybil or anybody.

Then what *am* I to do? It's awful lying here, tossing and turning and wondering—ah! I have it. My diary. This is where a diary comes in so handy.

CHAPTER XIV

On Album Etiquette

I SHALL have to make a firm stand to-day. I can't go on like this. The Mayor and people will have to be told exactly the position I am in.

The doctor has ordered *perfect rest.* A quiet three weeks in the heart of the country. But so far life in the heart of the country has been one riotous rush.

That Program. I shudder when I think of it. Of what I have been through. Of what I shall still have to go through, unless I put my foot down at once.

It is going to be difficult. I can see that. How am I going to put my foot down without hurting these people's feelings?

They are nice people; charming people. They have gone to a great deal of trouble on my behalf. The program is magnificent: one long round of pleasure.

Little Slocum is treating me handsomely. If I were Royalty they couldn't be treating me more handsomely. In fact, when you come to think of it, there *is* something royal about that program. And only Royalty could stand it.

Royalty has got to stand that sort of thing. Royalty is brought up from infancy for the express purpose of standing it.

I have not been brought up like that, yet, from the moment of my arrival in Little Slocum my life has been a royal one—brass bands, Mayor's speeches, boy scouts, bands of hope. No ordinary constitution could stand it.

Of course I shall have to attend the prize distribution this afternoon. I haven't given them time to alter their arrangements. But afterwards—I must break it to them before the Sewing-Bee. I cannot and will not go to the Sewing-Bee.

Perhaps this afternoon won't be so bad. Anyway, it will seem restful after the morning. I hate leaving the fire, though. I think

I have caught cold. The water was very cold. Of course it *would* be on an Aquatic Sports day.

I ought to have changed the moment I got home, instead of stopping to explain to Sybil *why* I fell in.

I couldn't very well change in front of Sybil, and short of pushing her out of the room—well, of course, I hadn't the heart to do that.

Sybil was the only person in Little Slocum who did not go to the Aquatic Sports. Domestic duties chained her to the Sunrise Arms, but her heart, she told me, was in the lake.

If my heart had been the only thing of mine in the lake I wouldn't have minded so much.

I know I am catching cold. I am glad I got Sybil to make me a fire here in my bedroom. It is a little more secluded than the parlor. There are not quite so many people coming in and out.

Of course Thomas comes in and out.

Have I mentioned that Thomas is the village idiot's name? Thomas comes in and out of everywhere. It is an unwritten law in Little Slocum, and I am getting used to it.

He came in early this morning to remind me that I had a busy day in front of me.

I taxed him, rather sternly, perhaps, with the matter of the apple-pie bed. He looked at me blankly and innocently. I felt I had accused him unjustly. I apologized. He accepted the apology with great charm and simplicity.

I have discovered since that Thomas never remembers anything he has done the day before. That is, anything of a slightly discreditable nature. This explains his innocent, open countenance. I have known others similarly gifted, similarly countenanced. Not necessarily village idiots. It is a happy trait.

Thomas brought round his open countenance before breakfast. He superintended my toilet and the breaking of my fast—that

is, if what actually happened can be called breaking fast.

I realize that I am very hungry. I am prepared to tackle even the mature charms of poached egg à la Sunrise and bacon à la brine. Breakfast is laid in the parlor. A delicious smell of coffee essence greets me as I enter.

The parlor, thank heaven, is empty—but for Thomas.

Thomas lifts the dish cover. He pokes the poached egg with a tentative fore-finger. He pronounces it nicely done. He begs me to make myself at home. I intend to do so.

I become conscious of a tumult without. There is a shuffling of feet; a whispering and giggling; a jostling against the door; here and there a tiny squeal, as of the female young of the species.

Thomas, too, has heard the stir.

"Come in!" he cries. Hospitality is one of Thomas's most marked characteristics.

And they come in. Yes; it *is* the female

young of the species. The female young, bearing albums. Blushfully, gigglingly, bearing albums.

Forty flappers with forty albums. Shy flappers, bold flappers, short flappers and tall flappers, fat flappers and thin flappers, all with the one request: Will I do something in their albums?

Why, yes, of course I will. Certainly, with pleasure.

Should they leave their albums? Why, certainly, yes. Yes, of course. Don't mention it. A pleasure. A most delightful task.

A little persiflage; a speck of innocent raillery; a soupçon of badinage. Smiling, giggling, whispering, forty flappers withdraw, leaving forty albums behind them.

I contemplate the albums. Somehow forty albums seem more formidable now that forty flappers have departed.

Have I been a trifle rash, I wonder? How long will forty somethings in forty albums take me to do?

I make a rapid mathematical calculation. The result is a staggering blow: I discover that ten minutes spent upon each volume will mean close on seven hours' hard labor.

However, it *can't* be helped. A promise is a promise. Impossible to disappoint these trusting flappers. Then let me begin forthwith.

"Art is long and Time is fleeting." The poet never wrote truer words than these. At the end of an hour I find I have completed only three albums. Twenty minutes over each album. Not nearly quick enough. At this rate the job will take me fourteen hours. I must get a move on.

If Thomas would only leave me for a little while. But Thomas is not going to leave me. He stands at my elbow and makes suggestions.

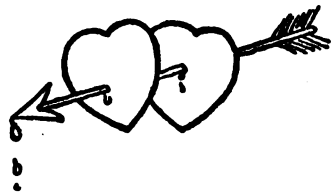
Thomas has ideas about albums. He knows all about albums. He knows what is the correct thing to put in albums. For instance—a sprig of forget-me-not, and beneath it, lest the skill of the artist or the intelligence of the

beholder should be found wanting, the printed word, thus:—

FORGET-ME-NOT

Or else two hearts, united by an arrow, significantly, thus:—

Bleeding, if preferred, in this wise:—



Also that famous exhortation: "Be good, sweet child, and let who will be clever."

Thomas believes it is the Vicar who has composed this. I have not the heart to mention Charles Kingsley.

Then there is that very witty drawing of a donkey, with the inscription: "When this you see, remember me." With the alternative rendering:—

From one to another.

Each of these Thomas characterizes as "a fair scream," though, personally, I find he has a leaning towards the sentimental, as expressed by hearts, arrows and flowers; and towards the tragic, such as the picture of a tombstone, and underneath the legend, "My love is deep and silent as the grave," alternatively with, "I die for love of thee," or:

"I'd e'en risk this
To taste the bliss
Of one sweet kiss."

I endeavor to point out to Thomas that these and similar expressions of a highly affectionate nature scarcely fit the circumstances of the case. But in this he disagrees with me.

According to Thomas, the things one puts in albums bear no relation to actual facts. Thus, that a respectable married man should avow the passionate devotion of a lifetime for forty flappers in forty albums appears to Thomas in no wise unreasonable. On the contrary, according to Thomas, album etiquette prescribes it. The owners of albums expect it. And such avowal of passion, poetically expressed, in no wise compromises the writer, I understand from Thomas.

I have not the heart to disappoint Thomas. Neither do I desire to appear churlish or ungallant in the eyes of these pretty, expectant flappers.

Thus it may happen that some stranger not versed in album etiquette, on beholding my contributions to these forty albums, will

receive a false impression. He will possibly depart with the idea that here is some Don Juan, some Casanova, some Lothario, who, with shameless audacity, lays simultaneous siege to forty hearts.

This is not so. Let me record it here. I seek not to bring vain blushes to the cheek of youth and beauty nor to raise false hopes in forty virgin bosoms. I merely bow to album etiquette.

I have completed some half-dozen avowals of undying affection, appropriately illustrated. Thomas leans over me as I labor; he breathes down my neck, he comments with frankness upon my work—in short, he collaborates.

Another tumult without. What is it? Who are these? A deputation of prominent citizens (in sporting costume) come to conduct me to the water carnival. I had no idea it was so late. The albums will have to wait. Let us to the lake.

CHAPTER XV

AQUATIC

THE lake is the biggest thing in Little Slocum. With justice, Little Slocum is proud of the lake. The lake is large, and in parts the lake is deep. It is over seven feet deep. I speak with authority. I know.

Thanks to the lake, every man, woman and child in Little Slocum is an aquatic expert. That any one should *not* be an aquatic expert is therefore inconceivable to Little Slocum.

Little Slocum takes it for granted that I am an aquatic expert. I am not. If there is one thing I am not, it is that.

A slight knowledge of hydrostatics I may have. Hitherto that knowledge has been merely theoretical. I have heard of the Principle of Archimedes. Archimedes has told us that a body immersed in water loses in weight; that it loses an amount

equivalent to the weight of the water it displaces.

I have always taken Archimedes' word for this. I have been moved by no irreverent desire to prove the thing for myself. I would have been perfectly willing to go on believing old Archimedes. But I must say what happened just now has made me lose faith. Those old Greek Johnnies *did* make mistakes, and I dare say Archy was no exception.

Anyway, nothing is going to convince me that I grew lighter in the lake just now. Why, I felt myself getting heavier every minute. I *know* I got heavier. Else why should I have gone to the bottom?

Of course, I may be an exception. Other bodies may lose in weight. All I know is that I don't.

I shall give this information to the scientists for what it is worth. They may like to experiment on themselves—immerse themselves in water and see what happens to them. I advise them to look into this Principle of

Archimedes. The man may be an utter fraud.

I have made a discovery about the inhabitants of Little Slocum. If they once get an idea into their heads no power on earth will get it out again.

I am aware that a surgical operation has occasionally been recommended in cases of this kind. I doubt whether even this would have any marked effect upon the Little Slocumites. I doubt it.

In the eyes of Little Slocum I am and always shall be an aquatic expert. In the eyes of Little Slocum I am also, and always shall be, a "comic."

These two ideas are fixed, immutable.

I am an aquatic expert. Accordingly, I have been entered for every event of the aquatic sports. These include a sculling race, an exhibition of fancy punting, a wangling match (note to the printer: *wangling,* not mangling), and a left-handed paddling display.

I point out to the committee that I am

not an aquatic export; that I can neither scull nor punt; that even right-handed paddling puzzles me and that no wangling is done here (note to printer: see above).

These statements are received by the committee as an excellent joke. The committee repeat them to the general public. The general public are delighted.

I protest, I remonstrate earnestly: shouts of spontaneous laughter.

I am conducted to the water. In vain I remind the committee that you may lead a horse to the water but you cannot make him drink. A *bon mot,* well received. Its true significance is lost.

I find myself—there is no apparent effort on my part—seated in a boat of some kind. I gather that an "event" is about to start. I am not sure whether it is the wangling match or the sculling race. I enquire. Screams of laughter. What a caution I am, to be sure.

Clearly, action of some kind is expected of me. There is a pair of oars in the boat. I

place the oars into the water. That is I place one oar into the water. The other oar, somehow, turns out to be the boat-hook. Lord sakes, ain't I a funny 'un!

Yes, I am a great success. It is not exactly a sculling race, because I never really start racing. I am just about to begin when I find it is already over. Just as I have managed (really very neatly) to place both oars into their proper positions, the winner arrives back at the starting-point.

Looking back now, I am not clear about the order of events. At the moment, I am not very clear about anything. I have a headache. And besides, even now I am not really an aquatic expert. All these nautical terms are so confusing. But I do know this: I have given a very creditable display of fancy punting. Fancy punting. The program said fancy punting. That gave me plenty of scope. I am not one to miss my opportunities. Yes, though I say it myself, give me a punt-pole (and a punt, of course) and bid me to do fancy punting, and I guar-

antee I will do more fancy punting in a given time than any other fancy-puntster in this country.

I hope I am not unduly conceited about this fancy punting. But, really, I astonished every one. I astonished myself. The way I worked up to the climax, and the climax itself. I thought the house would never stop applauding. In fact, I began to wonder whether I hadn't better ask them to stop applauding and start rescuing me.

Strictly speaking, I had not definitely arranged the climax. I had not planned to fall into the water at that precise moment. In fact, I am not sure whether I had meant to fall into the lake at all. But it was most effective: in the very deepest part of the lake.

A series of complicated evolutions with the punt-pole (giving the vessel a rotary movement) and then the final *coup* (a *tour-de-force*).

The punt-pole shoots skillfully from under me. I swing for a moment from the apex

of the pole in an acrobatic position. I realize that I have achieved a triumph.

I SWING FOR A MOMENT FROM THE APEX OF THE POLE

The shout that bursts from every throat assures me of that. Never shall I forget

that moment. It *is* only a moment. One cannot sustain such moments for long. And so I leave the punt-pole. I proceed to prove the principle of Archimedes.

Was it unreasonable to expect that, at this point, my performance should be regarded as at an end? As a solo, at any rate.

I had worked hard. I had done my bit. Now let the others come in. I have given them their cue.

I picture myself seized, dragged ashore, borne aloft by many willing pairs of arms. The picture is not realized. My struggles, my shouts for help, are misinterpreted. An exhibition of exquisite humor. The general hilarity increases in inverse ratio to my own. A note of urgency creeps into my appeals for succor. The effect is screamingly amusing.

I come up for the second time. The first time I come up under the punt. The second time I miss the punt—I miss it so completely that my clutching hand hits only air—and water. Water. Large quantities of water.

I go under for the third time. As I do so, it occurs to me that my past life is *not* rising up before me in one illuminating flash. Therefore I cannot be drowning. But it is a very good imitation.

I come up for the third time. Good old punt, I have you now! Stand still a minute, can't you, while I clamber in? What a fidgety thing a punt is! Impossible to climb in out of the water. I am still stiff from yesterday. The day has left its mark upon me, its marks, I should say. No, it is not possible to climb into the punt. But the punt is moving towards the shore. It is moving into shallow water. My feet touch bottom. I am saved.

The Vicar congratulates me warmly. It has been a most enjoyable morning.

CHAPTER XVI

Prize-Giving

Great Scott! Those albums! I was forgetting all about them. I had better polish off a few before the Prize Distribution. I'll go and get them.

What's that? Come in! Thomas, of course. But why knock? He has never knocked before.

Jehoshaphat, what is this? Thomas in *evening dress.* The evening dress of Walter, or I eat my hat. There can be no two such.

But why—evening dress? The hour of the prize distribution is 3 p.m. It is a ceremonial occasion, I grant you, but still—! This is positively continental. Is Little Slocum becoming—*Prussianized?* Perish the thought.

It flashes across my mind that perhaps there are going to be refreshments and Thomas has volunteered his services as waiter.

But no, there will be no refreshments. Thomas is to be no waiter. And he is wearing evening dress because—well, because he likes wearing evening dress and because he cannot wear it in the evening when Walter is wearing it. A very excellent reason. Let it suffice. And let those who would jeer at the simple creature consider: Have they never worn evening dress *for breakfast?*

Dear me, how time flies! I have not yet lunched, my hair is still damp, and it is time to start for the prize distribution.

I swallow a rapid sandwich—that is, I swallow a sandwich rapidly. It is the best way to take the sort of sandwich they give you here. If you start thinking about it you are lost.

I make a hasty toilet—hasty, perforce, not only from want of time but also from want of tools. I find none on my dressing-table. Where are my brushes, my comb, my presentation silver? I certainly unpacked them. I distinctly remember using them this morning.

Ah! Sybil, no doubt, is cleaning them. They had not struck me as being in need of cleaning. But these country people are often hyper-particular. And I must hurry, or I shall be late.

I am sorry the prize distribution is to be held on the green. The afternoon is chilly. And my hair is still damp. I should have preferred an indoor rather than an *al fresco* function. My teeth are chattering. Shall I go back for an overcoat? No, I am already a little late.

So I am to give away the prizes. That means another speech, I suppose. What am I going to say? I wish I had arranged my thoughts a little beforehand. I would not like the Vicar or the Mayor to—ah! there is the table with the prizes upon it. What a fine show of—electro-plate, I suppose it is. Quite a dazzling show.

The Vicar and the Mayor hasten towards me. They welcome me effusively. They conduct me to the table.

They are eloquent, enthusiastic, grateful.

I don't quite understand. Why are they thanking me?

Something about "generosity" and "handsome gifts." What *are* they talking about? Why are they—why—what, in Heaven's name, is the meaning of this? How did all those things from my dressing-table get here? And labeled; tied up with ribbon. Labeled: "Sculling, first prize"; "Sculling, second prize"; "Punting, first prize." And so on and so forth.

What the deuce—jumping Jerusalem and holy snakes, I see it all! It's that infernal simpleton, that scoundrelly Village Idiot. He must have abstracted them during my temporary absence—taken them to the Mayor with *my* compliments. Yes, the Mayor's next words confirm my worst suspicions.

"When Thomas brought them just now my wife and I were quite overcome by your generosity. They put our own humble contributions quite to shame." (Presentation silver, I should think so!) "So we have packed our gifts away till next year."

Generosity indeed! I think I have already remarked somewhere that there are occasions when words fail, when no language known to mortal man can possibly convey his feelings, and he had better not try. This is one of them.

It is well that I am inarticulate. Otherwise no decent library would circulate this book.

What can I do? What else can I do but what I *do* do? Smiling—a little wanly, perhaps, but still smiling—I hand over my splendid set of hair-brushes to the butcher's eldest son. I am sorry, but I have taken a dislike to the lad. He has a face like a plate, and, anyway, I have not tasted good red meat since I set foot in Little Slocum. My ration-book has not yet arrived.

With a few well-chosen words I give away my solid silver shaving-mirror to the baker, my collar-box to Walter's nephew, and my favorite clothes-brush to the grandchild of the verger.

And so the distribution proceeds.

I find that I have been awarded a consolation prize for trick diving and swimming. It is my own tooth-brush, collected, *inter alia*, by Thomas.

My suspicion that I have caught cold becomes a certainty. I have caught a rotten cold. It is impossible to stop sneezing. I am aching all over too.

I shall go straight to bed and stay there until I am better. It is not on the Program, but I don't care.

Thomas is keeping out of my way. Most unusual. A guilty conscience, no doubt. The misdemeanor is too recent for even Thomas to have forgotten. Thank goodness for that. Now I shall have a little peace.

CHAPTER XVII

I Receive

THERE is a small queue outside the Sunrise Arms. What for, I wonder? I thought the only queues left were theater queues and omnibus queues. And there are neither theaters nor 'buses in Little Slocum. Theaters and 'buses are too quiet for Little Slocum.

Well, I really don't mind what sort of a queue this is. It is no business of mine, anyway. And I am going straight to bed.

No business of mine! Miserable optimist that I am! This queue is waiting, not for omnibuses, nor orange marmalade, nor theaters, nor cheese. It is waiting for *me!*

Shades of all the philosophers, for me! I realize this too late. Too late to slip in by the back door and send word that I am in bed.

I am seen, I am recognized. I am surrounded.

I don't understand. Who are these people? What do they want? I wish they would talk singly instead of all together. I cannot hear a single word any one is saying. And it is terribly chilly standing there in the breeze outside the door. Better to ask them in. Then, perhaps, presently they will go away. Ask them in and get them to talk one at a time. Yes, it is the best plan.

First of all, this lank and long-haired rustic with the fiery eye. The Village Poet, perhaps? But no, the age of long-haired poets is past. More probably it is the greengrocer.

No; after all, it *is*—the age of long-haired poets is not past in Little Slocum.

The poet has written a song. It is the very song for me. The poet tells me that it will be the making of me. This is good news. The poet has brought the song. It is a most unusual song. He will recite it to me. He does recite it to me.

Yes, the poet is right. It is a most unusual song. The meter is unusual; every line has an unusual number of feet. The rimes are unusual: "Motor-car" as a rime for "canary" is unusual; so is "sunbeam" and "sewing machine." Most of all, the meaning seems unusual; so unusual that, for the moment, I am unable to find it.

I assure the poet that it is a remarkable song. I beg him to leave it with me, so that I may study it. It is the kind of song that cannot be lightly dealt with; the kind of song that should always be left. And so, away with the poet.

Next, a gentleman who says he is anxious to "make for" me. Does he mean "go for" me, and if so, what harm have I ever done him?

No, he does not want to go for me. He wants to make me a suit. He is the Village Tailor.

The suit he could make for me would be like no other suit I have ever had, he tells me. I believe the man is speaking the truth.

He whips off my coat and measures the more important positions. My figure, he says, has never been properly understood. My tailor in town has never understood it. *Line* is everything. One must study Line. Has my own tailor ever studied line?

MY FIGURE, HE SAYS, HAS NEVER BEEN PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD

I hesitate to reply. I am confused, abashed by the scrutiny of this sartorial giant. Not a single imperfection of my miserable town-made suit has, I feel sure, escaped his highly specialized eye.

I beg him, humbly, to make for me. I leave it all to him. He assures me I could not do better. My figure, it appears, is as an open book to him.

As for the suit I am wearing—well, no one would think I *had* a figure!

He looks round for confirmation upon the assembled company. Nods and murmurs of approval. There is a general impression that my tailor in town has been lamentably negligent in the matter of Line.

My outer man having been thus satisfactorily provided for, it transpires that my inner man also is causing some concern.

It is Mr. Mort, the Village Pharmacist, who informs me that I am "looking ghastly." He has noticed this. Very kindly, he has brought me a pill. Would I care to try the pill? Would I oblige him by swallowing it?

Really, this is very good of the man. Very kind and thoughtful. Of course, I will take the pill. I shall be charmed to take the pill.

It is a very large pill. I have never seen so large a pill. I should be inclined to call it a bolus rather than a pill.

Not without difficulty (though still quite charmed, of course) I swallow the pill. It sticks in my throat. And again, later on.

Three glasses of water speed it on its final journey.

Mr. Mort betrays excitement. For one accustomed to the daily, nay hourly, administration of pills, he really betrays a quite surprising amount of excitement.

This appears less surprising when I learn that the pill (or bolus) I have just swallowed is one of Mr. Mort's own invention.

It appears still less surprising when he informs me that I am the first person living who has ever swallowed it.

Thus the pill swallowing is in the nature of an experiment. It is a particularly interesting experiment, the inventor tells me. The element of uncertainty which characterizes all experiments is, in this case, even greater than usual. The pill contains a hitherto untried combination of herbs, the effects of which upon the human system cannot possibly be foreseen.

Interesting! Hah! I conceal my annoyance, lest it be mistaken for nervousness. I am not nervous. I am simply annoyed.

Intensely annoyed. The man has taken a great liberty. He has made far too free with my system. My system is *not* an experimental system. It is not fitted up for that sort of thing. Besides, experiments are particularly inconvenient just now, during this Rest Cure.

MR. MORT, THE VILLAGE PHARMACIST

Naturally, I took it for granted that fellow Mort knew what the pill was going to do. I took it to be a simple wholesome tonic of some kind.

I wonder what it *is* going to do? He had better tell me a few things it *might* do. Not that I am nervous. I simply wish to be prepared.

Oh, well, the pill *may* make me a little feverish; it may send up my temperature a point or two.

Then, again, it may not. It may have the opposite effect. It may send me down a bit below normal.

Of course it *might* accelerate the action of the heart, or it might not. In fact, it might cause a perceptible slowing down. And palpitation, possibly, may be looked for.

Of course, some little pain would be perfectly natural—the different properties of all these different constituents warring with one another, you know—yes, a little discomfort may certainly be expected.

I enquire coldly *where* the discomfort may be expected. (I trust my tone is not discourteous.) The inventor grows vague on the question of locality. In the abdominal regions, probably, or possibly in the head. Yes, a sharp stabbing pain in the head is far from unlikely.

Then, there might be other symptoms: Dizziness—a feeling of "goneness"—spots before the eyes—rushes of blood to the head—Good God, is the man mad? What *is* the sense of making a pill like that? Who *wants*

to get feverish and have discomfort in the abdominal regions and rushes of blood to the head and what not?

Mr. Mort looks hurt at the enquiry. He explains that it is the ultimate result we must consider. And the ultimate result he has aimed at with his pill is—TONE. To tone up the system, that is the great thing. Every system requires tone. This is the pill for tone. (What is tone?) All these trifling symptoms he has enumerated should pass, and then there will remain—TONE.

Perhaps. We hope so. Tone at any price appears to be Mr. Mort's motto. Nothing now to be done but wait. He will call again in an hour or two to see how I am getting on.

Mr. Mort departs. But there are others. There is, for instance, Albert Thatcher, the Village Genius. He who made the chair. He refers to the chair. He reminds me that it was the hit of the evening. It was. There is a lump the size of a pigeon's egg on the back of my head to testify to that.

The manufacture of punitive furniture is not

the village genius's sole activity. His genius is universal, it would appear.

In the first place, he informs me, he is not only a cabinet-maker, but also an undertaker.

He pauses. He looks at me enquiringly, nay, appraisingly. This on top of the pill of the chemist. Bad form—extremely bad form! Lack of delicacy. Really, one would think the fellow is taking my measure. He seems engaged in mental arithmetic. A ghoul-like occupation for an undertaker.

I take refuge in facetiousness. I enquire how coffins are now being worn.

As water is to a duck's back, so is my facetiousness to the back of Mr. Thatcher. He replies that coffins are being worn as usual; that oak is considered a great deal smarter than elm. It will also wear better, and is therefore worth the extra money.

He imparts this information, and a good deal more upon the same subject, in a helpful and sympathetic manner. He remarks that

it is far more satisfactory to deal with the party direct than with relatives.

It is impossible to ignore the pointed personal allusion. At the moment I am "the party direct" he is referring to.

ALBERT THATCHER, THE VILLAGE GENIUS

It is clear that I have raised false hopes in the poor fellow's breast. I had better apologize to him.

I do so. I explain, deprecatingly, that, though temporarily indisposed, I do not consider the state of my health warrants my taking the step he has in his mind. And that, in the event of my being mistaken, I have every confidence in my relatives, and would cheerfully delegate the pleasing task to them. Not wishing to appear churlish, however, I add that, in case I *did* get worse and decided to pop off

after all, he might leave me his card. This I undertake to leave upon my mantelpiece in a prominent position, where my bereaved relatives would be sure to see it.

Thus, ending on a note of hope, I dismiss the village genius.

At least, I am momentarily under that impression. But Albert Thatcher is not to be disposed of so easily. There is a little sideline of his, he explains, and produces another card.

This card informs me that Mr. Albert Thatcher is an insurance agent. If I would care to take out a little policy, the terms of his company are particularly generous, and one never knows—fire or accidents, or burglars, and then, of course, there's always sickness, he adds, optimistically.

This time my answer may be brief and final—I am insured already. Against *everything?* enquires Mr. Thatcher. Certainly, against everything. Even against—Mr. Thatcher drops his voice to a confidential whisper—*suicide?*

Most companies, says Mr. Thatcher, refuse to provide against suicide. Not so *his* people. His people are broad. They are all-embracing. They have made a specialty of suicide.

Mr. Thatcher regards me fixedly. Really this fellow has a perfect genius for making one feel uncomfortable.

I don't think I have ever contemplated suicide. Even with life at its darkest and most desperate, that way out has never appealed to me. Yet Mr. Thatcher seems to expect it of me. "Potential suicide," says his confident and penetrating eye. Quaking, I turn my vision inwards: *Am* I so very sure of myself really? Might not contingencies arise?

"Think it over," says Mr. Thatcher benevolently. "It might be worth your while."

I promise, guiltily. Almost it seems in the nature of an undertaking—some time, at some future date. As our best writers say: *"Quien sabe?"*

I shake Mr. Thatcher by the hand. The action is ill-advised. It is premature. Mr.

Thatcher is not going yet. He produces another card. Really, this card-producing is becoming prestidigitatorial. (I am safe in writing this, *I* shall not have to pronounce it.)

Mr. Thatcher's third card takes me by surprise. This remarkable man is also an Artist. The card does not specify the precise nature of Mr. Thatcher's art. He hastens to supply the omission.

He is an artist in the widest sense of the word. He represents every branch of art, he tells me modestly.

Painting? Yes, he paints a little. Pictures, you know. And panels. It comes in very handy with the cabinet-making and that. Yes, people like little sprays, leaves and flowers, and sometimes fruit on the backs of chairs and in the middle of pianos and on coffin-tops (no, not coffee-pots—coffin-tops).

Oh, yes, landscapes and portraits as well. But Still-Life was his favorite. Yes, he might say he'd made quite a success of Still-

Life. That was a little thing of his over the pianola.

Yes, of course I had noticed it—an exceptionally corpulent carp in a piece of very blue material. My reason had informed me that the blue material, since it harbored a carp, was very likely water.

What did I think of it? Would I tell Mr. Thatcher *honestly* what I thought of it?

I tell him, honestly, that it is a fine carp—a splendid carp—and I describe the blue material as "translucent." This, I consider, is a happy touch. Albert Thatcher is gratified.

The picture, he tells me, was his gift to the landlord incidental to business relations of an agreeable nature—the re-upholstering by Mr. Thatcher of this very parlor.

He calls my attention to another work of his upon the opposite wall. What do I think of it?

Poached egg on spinach—a clever study. No—the village green by moonlight. A *faux-pas*—not serious, but still a trifle awk-

ward. But why would the man keep harping on still-life?

To change the subject—what other forms of art does Mr. Thatcher go in for? Music, of course? Well, yes, music, to a certain extent. That is, Albert is assistant organist to the Vicar's aunt. He does the blowing. It is hard work, but he loves his art.

Painting—music—but that is not all. *The Drama.* Ah, Mr. Thatcher thought that would astonish me. Yes, he is an actor.

The reason I had never heard his name was because, so far, he had had no opportunity of acting professionally. That was to come.

He had thought later on—yes, it *did* seem a pity to waste his talent in Little Slocum. There was no scope in Little Slocum.

And acting was really Mr. Thatcher's strong point. Acting came natural to him. It was no trouble at all. He could do anything in the acting line. Why, then, had he not shone last night at the Band of Hope Concert?

Ah, there you are! Why not, indeed? To tell the truth, he had volunteered, but the Vicar had made excuses. Of course, everybody knew why. He *could* say things, only he'd rather not. Besides, everybody knew. Really, the way the Vicar pushed his own family and kept out them that—well, there, perhaps he'd better not say anything! Only, everybody knew.

Mr. Thatcher's particular line? *Anything.* He could be funny, of course. Make people die with laughing, he could.

Yes, he'd do well on the halls, he thought. Of course, the sort of thing *I* do, just saying something silly and then waiting till people laughed, he could do that, if necessary. And if I could get him an engagement, say at the Coliseum, he was quite willing to have a go.

Only, the comic business (I'd excuse him, he was sure) didn't exactly appeal to him. Something more *artistic,* he'd like. Dying men, fathers pleading with erring sons or cursing straying daughters (the young squire

is really to blame)—that sort of thing he could do a treat.

If I liked, he'd do me a bit, to show me. You never know, it might come in handy when people got tired of the comic stuff.

I thanked him warmly. I shall be delighted—later on. Some other day. Just now—if he would kindly excuse me—if everybody would kindly excuse me—I have urgent business letters to write—must catch the afternoon post. Yes, to-morrow I shall be charmed to see *everybody*. Yes, charmed. Good afternoon. *Good* afternoon. Delighted.

CHAPTER XVIII

I Feel Frightful

I am alone at last. That is, alone with Thomas.

Thomas does not seem to realize that he is living under a cloud. Either the episode of the Presentation Silver has passed from his mind, or he has decided to be forgiven. At all events, here he is.

I don't feel equal to the strain of explaining things to Thomas, and so the affair of the prizes is not referred to by either of us.

Perhaps if I learn to regard Thomas as one regards a somewhat mischievous but faithful domestic pet, I shall be able to endure him. At any rate, I prefer Thomas's society to Albert's, or to that diabolical chemist's.

By the way, is it that fellow's beastly pill that is making me feel so frightful, or is it

simply the cold I have caught? Or is it the cumulative effect of everything that I have been through lately?

Was it yesterday only (it seems a century ago) that I wrote: "The worst of Little Slocum is getting there"? I should like to revise that sentiment: "The worst of Little Slocum is having got there."

I do feel rotten. I think I have now got all the symptoms the chemist man talked about.

Is there a doctor in this awful place? Everybody seems to have been here to see me this afternoon, but I can't remember a doctor. No, I don't think there was a doctor. Only that infernal chemist.

There must be a doctor in Little Slocum. I'd better send for him. Good gracious, perhaps it's Albert Thatcher! He's everything. I dare say he's the doctor, too. No, I have had enough of Albert Thatcher for one day. I couldn't risk it. My temperature would certainly go up to boiling-point if I had a little more of Albert.

Well, I shall go to bed.

The Sewing-Bee, Thomas reminds me; the Little Slocum Mothers. Am I going to desert the Little Slocum Mothers?

I tell him the Little Slocum Mothers can go to Halifax. He says there are no trains to Halifax. I cannot argue with the lad. I am past arguing.

I go to bed. In bed I shall be safe from everybody, even from Little Slocum Mothers. Thomas shall take my regards to the Sewing-Bee.. He shall explain how bad I am.

I could not possibly sew. I believe if only I didn't ache so all over I might manage to sleep.

I think I'd better have a good stiff whiskey. That's it: a good stiff whiskey, to lull the pain and send me to sleep. Good! Let Thomas summon the sympathetic Sybil. A double whiskey may suffice, nay, better, say two double whiskeys.

Sybil appears, and Thomas, good lad, goes upon his errand to the Sewing-Bee.

"A double whiskey twice, dear Sybil."

The worthy soul throws up her hands in horror. Horror at this debauchery? No, her next words testify that Sybil is not that sort. Sybil can summon spirits from the vasty deep without turning a hair. I hope this about spirits is correct. I quote from memory. I have lent my dictionary of quotations to Henry ——, who is writing his reminiscences.

Sybil is once more horrified at my appearance. (She spends a great deal of time in that way.) However, she has changed her mind about the small-pox, and I am grateful to her. What she took for small-pox must have been the pale morning light filtering through my dressing gown. Sybil decides that it is not small-pox I am suffering from. Most likely it is the latest kind of influenza.

"Worse than the Plague, it is," Sybil reminds me. "People dying in the streets like flies." Well, I have always thought that if I have *got* to die, I might do worse than die like a fly. A fly's death has always struck me as peculiarly peaceful and painless. I

mean, a fly's natural death, of course. I presume this is what Sybil is referring to, not the death-by-boy, in which the unhappy insect is first denuded of all its arms and legs.

For a while Sybil engages me in conversation on funerals and kindred topics. I reflect that there is a tendency among Little Slocumites to dwell upon the perishable nature of mankind, though the evident enjoyment derived therefrom seems to rob the subject of much of its gloom.

Sybil is so cheerful regarding the possibility of my imminent dissolution that I myself am almost disposed to look upon the event as something festive and beanoistic (this word is, or ought to be, derived from the Greek).

I find this impression is strengthened upon the appearance—and disappearance—of the double whiskey twice.

That peaceful glow so often referred to by poets and others pervades my being. I feel delightfully drowsy. Even my aching limbs seem to belong not so much to me as to some

third party whose sufferings may be endured, sympathetically endured, but with a certain equanimity.

No, after all, there is nothing much the matter with me. Sleep is all I want—a good long sleep and I shall be as right as a trivet—as right as—what *is* a trivet?—as right as—— What's that? That hubbub somewhere in the hall below—or on the stairs. Yes, on the stairs. Rustling, bustlings, female voices, coughs, scrapings, shushings. On the stairs. In the corridor. Outside my room. What is it?

What on earth is it? I sit up in bed, alarmed—strangely alarmed at I don't know what. I watch my door with fevered eyes. Yes, as I thought, the handle is being turned, the door opens, it admits—merciful powers! *The Sewing-Bee!*

THE SEWING-BEE

CHAPTER XIX

I Feel Worse

It is a dream, of course. I have strange dreams in Little Slocum. First, the dream about Flannelette and the cows and that mad moonlight gambol.

And now—queerer and queerer—not *one* Flannelette, but a dozen of kindred species. Not garmented in pink material, but black, or blackish.

Dreams! Shadows of Little Slocum Mothers, grotesque, unreal, yet with quaint touches of reality.

For instance, that bulging bag or basket on each matron's arm—bulging with Madapollam and unbleached calico.

Then that powerful odor of moth-balls—how life-like! And the ospreys quivering in a dozen bonnets (yes, bonnets for matrons in Little Slocum).

But this dream, surely, is weirder even than

the other. That strange creature, for instance, the out-size matron, richly dressed in crape, who approaches my bedside. Such fantastic shapes one sees only in dreams.

What is she going to do?

Had she leapt upon a bed-post and, balanced on one golosh, gyrated there, or had she taken fright and hovered near the ceiling like some enormous bat, I should not have been surprised.

But she does neither of these things. She merely sits down upon my bed. The frail structure creaks and groans beneath the burden it is thus unexpectedly called upon to bear, but it does not give way. A large contralto voice addresses me.

"Young man, this ain't no time for ceremony. I've come to look arter you."

She is sitting on my feet. I try to remove them from under her. In vain. Solid, immovable, she sits upon them. One has that sensation often in dreams—a frantic urgency to move, an utter inability to do so.

"Lawk-a-mussy, he's havin' a fit!" I hear

some one exclaim in an undreamlike voice. The voice seems to proceed from a meager little woman in a green mantilla. The little woman bears a curious resemblance to an underfed white rabbit—a white rabbit peeping from a cabbage-patch.

"He's havin' a fit!" is echoed by many voices in many keys. "A fit! a fit!"

It appears to my disordered fancy that the prevailing tone of this announcement is less one of alarm and solicitude than of pleased anticipation—rather like the sigh that goes up from a breathless house as the curtain rises upon the scene where the crime will be committed.

"Nonsense! He's no more havin' a fit than I am!" says the rich contralto. "He's got a pain somewhere. That's why he's makin' them faces. Young man, where do you feel the pain?"

"In my feet," I murmur faintly.

"Gout!" pronounces the rich contralto.

"Gout!" echo the others, not without a shade of disappointment.

"Gout! Painful, but not dangerous. Unromantic!" I seem to hear them thinking.

"Not gout," I protest; "you are sitting on my feet."

I fear I have annoyed Contralto. She bounces off my bed with what is generally known as the air of an offended queen, though perhaps there is a little too much of this one for strict queenliness, and, drawing herself up to her full height, she sweeps—no, she does not sweep across the room, she merely makes a sweeping movement to the top end of my bed and stands looking down upon me with a condemnatory eye.

"Young man, what *is* the matter with you?" she booms.

I begin to wonder whether, after all, this *is* a dream. People are not generally so definitely inquisitive in dreams. But I have no time for speculation. The lady obviously is waiting for an answer. I inform her, apologetically, that I believe I have caught a cold.

"A cold!" cries she, reproachfully. "From what Thomas said, you'd 'ave imagined he was dyin'! Here, Thomas—no, you don't!" She catches Thomas as he is about to sneak from the room. "Now, then, what do you mean by tellin' such stuff and tarradiddles?"

Thomas protests. He has told no stuff and tarradiddles. I am as near dying as winking, according to Thomas. As I am nowhere near winking, this is strictly true.

"Young man, put out your tongue!" comes the thunderous command.

I blench. I hesitate. If there is one thing I dislike doing more than any other it is putting out my tongue. It is unbeautiful and undignified. I hate putting out my tongue, even to a doctor. But to be expected to put out my tongue to a Sewing-Bee—to twelve matrons to whom I had not even been introduced—no, it was unthinkable. I couldn't do it.

"Young man, put out your tongue!" repeats the relentless voice.

No, I don't think this is a dream. I wish it was. I might wake up.

I mutter that I would rather not.

"Put out your tongue, young man, and don't be silly!"

"I don't know you," I stammer weakly.

"This ain't no time for ceremonies and pomp and show and introductions," my antagonist retorts. "But if it'll make you put out your tongue, I'll tell you. Mrs. Simmings is me name, and this here is my friend, Mrs. Leach, in the silk mantilla, and that's Mrs. Tompkins, her in the pearl and turquoise brooch, and likewise Mrs. Uckle and Mrs. Penny—her in the black moiré—and my aunt, Mrs. Fisher—she's deaf, so you needn't mind her—and that lady who's forgot to leave her umbereller in the hall, and for gracious sake why not put it in a corner and have done with it!"

The unhappy owner of the umbrella wilts perceptibly, drops the umbrella on the floor, and in picking it up catches a corner of my bed, apologizes confusedly, is suitably re-

buked by Mrs. Simmings, and thus creates a diversion which happily takes that lady's mind off nomenclature, though not off the main point under discussion. The umbrella having been bestowed, Mrs. Simmings continues:

"We're all married women and mothers six or seven deep, some of us." I take it she is referring to the number of offspring, not husbands. She does not look the sort of woman who would openly boast about septuple defiance of the marriage laws. "Now, then, young man!"

I feel furious, ludicrous, but helpless. I put out my tongue. Twelve Little Slocum matrons crane their necks, twelve pairs of eyes are glued upon my tongue. Doubtless they are ordinary eyes, perhaps even nice eyes in ordinary circumstances, but now—eyes like boot buttons, like boiled gooseberries, like codfish's eyes—detestable eyes.

Exclamations, gasps, clickings of teeth—what *is* the matter with me? And what business is it of the Sewing-Bee's anyway?

Why don't they leave me alone? I wish they would go away, instead of standing and gloating like that. I want to be left alone, that's all I want.

I shall tell them to go away. I shall say to that officious Simmings woman as soon as I can catch her eye—no, perhaps not. There's something about that woman—over-powering, that's what she is. You can't tell a woman like that to go away. No, it can't be done.

What's that she's saying? She's going to take my temperature? Of course, she's bound to take my temperature. A woman like that would. You can't prevent her.

Ah, thank the Lord, she hasn't brought a thermometer. Nobody has brought a thermometer. *I* never travel with a thermometer *on principle.* I dislike thermometers. The mere sight of one sends up my temperature at once.

Mrs. Simmings ignores my views on thermometers. She behaves as though my feelings in the matter were quite outside the

case. She dispatches Thomas for a thermometer and divers Sewing-Bees on divers errands.

I listen to Mrs. Simmings's arrangements for my comfort. They strike terror to my heart.

In the first place, I am to be washed. Why? I *have* washed. I washed early this morning, and I was thoroughly immersed later on. Water, for the moment, is repugnant to me. But Mrs. Simmings has decided that I must be washed. She says it will refresh me.

I don't want to be refreshed. I want to go to sleep.

Ah! here is Mrs. Uckle with a can of nice, hot water. Mrs. Simmings washes my face. Mrs. Simmings washes my hands. I imagine that only the risk of pneumonia prevents this intrepid woman from going further. In her passion for thoroughness (thoroughness, it appears, is one of Mrs. Simmings's many strong points) Mrs. Simmings encroaches slightly upon my neck and arms.

The collar and wristbands of my pyjamas feel damp. But I am refreshed. I am thoroughly awake.

And the Sewing-Bee beams upon me. The Sewing-Bee shakes up my pillows. My pillows are of the nobbly flock variety—the kind that when you shake them up the nobbles harden and catch you in fresh places. The Sewing-Bee smooths my sheets. I hate having my sheets smoothed. It makes me feel worse. It makes me feel as if I was in a nursing home. It smacks of the trained nurse, and the trained nurse suggests a serious illness. I don't like the association of ideas.

CHAPTER XX

I Feel Worse and Worse

Mrs. Penny or somebody arrives with something on a plate. Something steaming hot and with a sickly, vaguely familiar smell. A pudding of some kind? Thanks, but, really, I don't feel like pudding at the moment.

No, it is not a pudding. It is a linseed poultice. Why a linseed poultice? I protest, but weakly. I feel it in my bones that if Mrs. Simmings has ordained I shall be poulticed, then poulticed I shall be.

I wish Mrs. Simmings had taken the temperature of the poultice. *Must* a linseed poultice really be as hot as—so very hot?

"As hot as the patient can bear" is supposed to be the proper temperature. But do they mean the patient's idea of what he can bear or the nurse's? This is important.

I have had linseed poultices before, and there is always the same difference of opinion. The person who applies the linseed poultice always says it is "just right," and the person to whom it is applied either gives one yell and projects the poultice into space, or, if he be of a meek, enduring nature, he merely groans and suffers excruciating agony.

I have known the friendship of years, if not broken, at least appreciably cracked, by this difference of opinion.

Where softer natures have proved adamant I could scarcely hope that Mrs. Simmings would relent. As she approaches with the poultice I set my teeth, I clench my hands, I am determined to show no fear. Fear, I feel instinctively, would not go well with Mrs. Simmings. It would only goad her sense of duty to sterner methods. Therefore I am resolved neither to cry out nor even to wince.

But Mrs. Simmings takes me by surprise. I am accustomed to having linseed poultices

lowered gradually upon my chest. All other appliers of linseed poultices with whom I am acquainted invariably apply them in a gingerly, tentative manner—the manner somewhat of the timid bather making acquaintance with the ocean on a chilly day.

Not so Mrs. Simmings. Mrs. Simmings might be said to hurl the linseed poultice at my chest rather than place it there.

The assault takes me unawares. I yell. I regret to say I yell. My nerves are all wrong. I am sorry. I cannot help it. And the Sewing-Bee yells in sympathy.

Mrs. Simmings, of course, does not yell. Mrs. Simmings gives me a look. I flinch before the scorn of her steely eye. I am shamed. I am humbled. I feel that nothing now can ever restore me to the respect I have forfeited in Mrs. Simmings's eyes.

Clapping a square of flannel over the boiling poultice, Mrs. Simmings turns contemptuously away.

The movement awakens in me a glimmer of hope. If only Mrs. Simmings would de-

spise me sufficiently to leave me—to wash her hands of me.

To be left alone by Mrs. Simmings is rapidly becoming the dearest wish of my heart.

But Mrs. Simmings does not leave me. Mrs. Simmings is a born commander. The born commander does not leave his post as long as there's any commanding to be done. And here is the Sewing-Bee—meek, admiring, eager to do Mrs. Simmings's bidding.

Some one—at Mrs. Simmings's command, of course—produces a bottle of carbolic. Mrs. Simmings sprinkles it liberally about the room. No sick-room, says Mrs. Simmings, is complete without carbolic.

I loathe carbolic. It always makes me sick. But what is that to Mrs. Simmings?

Washed, linseed-poulticed, soaked with carbolic, my pillows shaken, my sheets smoothed, I present a satisfactory spectacle to Mrs. Simmings.

For the moment appeased, she proceeds to marshal the Sewing-Bee.

It occurs to Mrs. Simmings that there is no reason why the Sewing-Bee should not sew. *She,* of course, will not be able to sew. I shall require her unremitting attention. But the others—let them out with their Madapollam and unbleached calico. Sewing is a restful and soothing occupation not only for the sewer, but for the looker-on; sewing will do me good, says Mrs. Simmings.

Chairs are required to accommodate the Sewing-Bee. Chairs! Thomas! Why does Thomas linger so long with the thermometer? Thomas shall bring chairs.

Thomas returns. He brings not only the thermometer, but also the gramophone. A tune will cheer me up.

For a moment Mrs. Simmings wavers. If it were possible to suspect Mrs. Simmings of weakness of any kind I should suspect her of a weakness for the gramophone. Mrs. Simmings wavers, but only for a moment. Naturally, Mrs. Simmings would never waver long. I am astonished even at this short bit of wavering. For a moment, then, she wavers.

A moment later she has made up her mind. She will at once take my temperature. It will depend upon my temperature whether I am to be allowed a little gramophone.

Mrs. Simmings thrusts the thermometer into my mouth in a masterful way and stands waiting, watch in hand. (Her eagle eye has, of course, located my wrist-watch without difficulty.)

I wish Mrs. Simmings would not look at me while she is waiting. I wish the Sewing-Bee would sew instead of staring so. Next to making him put out his tongue, I consider the most foolish position in which to place a man is to put a thermometer into his mouth; to prevent him from speaking and at the same time to address remarks to him that obviously require an answer.

Mrs. Simmings spares me not one iota of this trying situation. She fixes me with an unwinking gaze. She asks me questions. She makes remarks which, left unchallenged, reflect seriously upon my common sense, rea-

son, general intelligence and character. As, for example:

"Stomach out of order, I dessay. High livin'! Don't do nobody no good. Eatin' an' drinkin'! Folks eat an' drink a deal too much."

Naturally, I am a little hurt by this innuendo. I make faint, thermometary noises intended to be denials of the implication. Mrs. Simmings interprets them in her own way.

"Yes, of course," she continues. "Feastin' an' riotin' goes with the life—play-actin' an' feastin' an' riotin'!" (Mrs. Simmings seems pleased with the phrase.) "A short life an' a merry one, as the sayin' goes."

I deeply resent this aspersion upon an honorable and arduous calling. I am obliged to resent it inarticulately. But I manage to shake my head. I shake it, though not as emphatically as I would have liked. Fear of dislodging the linseed poultice handicaps my movements. I trust the

Sewing-Bee will gather from my face that I do not agree with Mrs. Simmings.

In the absence of chairs, Thomas has produced a bench from somewhere. Seated upon this bench is the Sewing-Bee. Side by side, in one long, disconcerting row, facing my bed, sit the Little Slocum Mothers —attentive, silent but for an occasional whisper, the rustle of a petticoat, or the creaking of some garment, invisible though surmisable.

"A short life an' a merry one," repeats Mrs. Simmings, darkly. "I've heard there's things as goes on on the stage as won't bear thinkin'! Riotin' an' drinkin' an' that," she explains; from which it would appear that a certain amount of thinking might be done by Mrs. Simmings, though not by vessels of weaker mold.

"There's a deal o' kissin' goes on behind the scenes," she continues, her inflexible gaze upon me. "Kissin' an' cuddlin'. I don't believe in it."

I cannot help reflecting that this is a wise

dispensation of Providence. The picture of a Mrs. Simmings who *did* believe in kissing and cuddling unnerves me. Who knows, with Mrs. Simmings's compelling personality, what the consequences of such a creed might not have been! Think of it! A flighty, flirtatious, glad-eyeing Mrs. Simmings, commanding to be cuddled! It staggers the imagination. As Mrs. Simmings herself would says, "it won't bear thinking."

After what seems about two hours, Mrs. Simmings says, "Now!" as though giving the signal for immediate action of some kind, wrests the thermometer from my lips, and takes it over to the window to read.

"Normal! Normal!" Mrs. Simmings utters the word twice. The first "Normal" suggests satisfaction at the reassuring state of affairs, the second a faint disapproval, as though, really, I had no business to have a normal temperature, considering all the trouble Mrs. Simmings was taking on my behalf.

"Thomas, the gramophone!"

Mrs. Simmings says this almost as though gramophones were the proper remedy for normal temperatures.

During the introductory bars of "If I were the Only Girl," I enquire of Thomas whether selections from "The Bing Boys" are the only records possessed by the Sunrise Arms.

Thomas replies absently. He is listening to the music. He replies absently, but with perfect clearness, that, if I want another double whiskey twice, half a bottle would be cheaper.

The Sewing-Bee exchange glances. I feel that the moment for the vindication of my calling has now passed.

It is not a good gramophone. Its best friend could not assert that it is good. It is a model of an earlier, probably a pre-historic, age. Its voice is like the voice of a New York commercial traveler suffering from nasal catarrh.

Thomas has placed the gramophone close to my bed.

The poet tells us that music hath charms to soothe the savage breast. But I don't think he meant this gramophone.

This gramophone, I find, does *not* soothe a breast rendered slightly savage by linseed poultice. The one great merit of gramophones like this is the marvelous feeling of well-being, of blessed relief and peace when the music suddenly ceases. It is the one thing that enables one to bear them with fortitude.

CHAPTER XXI

Mrs. Simmings and Hygiene

While the gramophone is making music, Mrs. Simmings put the room to rights. It should have been done before, she remarks, as she rolls up the carpet and commands Thomas to remove it.

If I am not at the moment suffering from small-pox or scarlet-fever I feel I ought to be. Mrs. Simmings, clearly, has studied hygiene. She is no believer in half-measures.

"Harbors germs," she explains, as she sweeps the ornaments off the mantelpiece, strips the curtains from window and hanging wardrobe and denudes the washstand of its drapery.

Had Mrs. Simmings removed the mattress from beneath me (surely a mattress "harbors germs!") I should not have been surprised.

It also occurs to me that, to be really consistent, Mrs. Simmings will be obliged to condemn the draperies of the Sewing-Bee and command Thomas to remove *them*. But this does not occur to Mrs. Simmings. The Sewing-Bee remains intact.

The gramophone ceases. It is as if a tooth had suddenly stopped aching. Thomas gets ready to put in another record. This is too much. I inform Thomas that I shall strangle him unless he takes the infernal instrument away.

A shiver of consternation goes through the Sewing-Bee. Only Mrs. Simmings betrays no emotion. She shrugs her shoulders magnificently and motions to Thomas to obey me, as who should say, "The man is a crank; it is of no consequence; let us humor him!"

They humor me. It is time to shake up my pillows, to smooth my sheets, to —no, I will *not* be washed again. Whatever happens, they shall not wash me.

I brace myself for the struggle. I brace myself needlessly. It is not washing time yet.

It occurs to me that I am hungry. I have had nothing to eat all day, nothing but a ham-fat sandwich at lunch-time. I intimate that I should like something to eat. The Sewing-Bee betrays faint surprise. From Mrs. Simmings's manner I gather that it is scarcely the correct thing for one in my condition to require food. It is contrary to use and custom. In the best circles, I am given to understand, the patient is coaxed to partake of nourishment, he never dreams of asking for it.

What would I like? enquires Mrs. Simmings reproachfully.

I would like about a pound of underdone steak, fried onions and chipped potatoes. But I dare not confess this. The Sewing-Bee would be sure to think me an impostor. They would never believe that my bones were aching, my muscles sore, my nerves jangled, my head splitting, that, in short, I was

entirely unfit for Sewing-Bees, yet capable of steak and onions.

No, it would be shocking and indecent to ask for steak. Besides, I should not get it. There is no such thing in Little Slocum; moreover, my ration-book has not yet arrived. Therefore I murmur, "Anything, it doesn't matter."

Mrs. Simmings now gives a brief dissertation on sick-room diet to the Sewing-Bee. When the patient is in bed, says Mrs. Simmings, only the smallest quantity of food is necessary. A heavy meal is not desirable. A heavy meal clogs up the system. On no account, therefore, must I partake of a heavy meal. My system must not be clogged up. Mrs. Simmings might have been saying, "Curfew shall not ring to-night," so dramatic is the tone in which she makes this final pronouncement.

Mrs. Simmings having departed in person to procure for me such unclogging nourishment as she may consider suitable, the Sewing-Bee expands in her absence.

I become aware of personalities hitherto kept under.

Two stout bees, one pale, the other red, rise simultaneously, approach my bedside, and enquire how I am feeling now. I do not tell them accurately how I am feeling—not then, at least. "Pretty bad, thank you," is as near the truth as I get for the moment.

The red-faced bee remarks to the white-faced bee that, if you ask her, a little drop of brandy is what I want.

The white-faced bee favors port wine rather than brandy. Brandy gets to the head, port wine to the stomach. It's the stomach that wants building up.

An egg beaten up in port wine, suggests the White Rabbit. Did we know that there is as much nourishment in a single egg as in a pound of steak?

Of course I know this. I have read of it in books and in the domestic columns of our daily Press. I have heard it mentioned by friends at the club, by strangers in railway

carriages, and at vegetarian lectures. It is a scientific truth. It is chemically correct. The egg is full of carbo-hydrates and albuminoids and things. It is bursting with them. Its shell is hardly big enough to hold them. An egg has all the virtues of the steak and none of its vices.

I grant you all this. I grant it gladly. And yet—I do like something to chew, something to get my teeth into. Two swallows, and where is an egg? "Building up the stomach," you will reply. "Building, without overloading." Quite so, exactly, but—Waiter! will that steak be long?

The red-faced bee and the white-faced bee continue to argue as to the relative building value of port and brandy. The White Rabbit is inclined to harp on eggs.

The conversation becomes general. Bees stop sewing and take sides. Bees in favor of brandy dispute with bees in favor of port. Teetotal bees denounce both methods. Carnivorous bees refer to beef-tea, lactic bees mention milk.

Mrs. Fisher, deaf and venerable aunt, takes no notice of the argument, but goes on running and felling unbleached calico. At times she pauses in her work, regards me intently, and murmurs "Pore young man, pore young man."

The precise nature of her compassion is not quite clear to me. Is the old lady sorry for me merely because I am ill, I wonder, or does her pity imply a subtle criticism of her niece's methods?

I fancy once or twice I have caught her looking at her redoubtable relative with an expression in her eye!!

Mrs. Simmings returns. Thereupon Mrs. Fisher discharges at me a "pore young man" so significantly, so fraught with meaning, that I tremble lest Mrs. Simmings should understand.

But I have yet to know Mrs. Simmings, to realize that that noble woman is incapable of understanding criticism of herself.

Mrs. Simmings, therefore, enters—untrou-

bled, unconscious, exuding efficiency at every pore.

Mrs. Simmings somehow conveys the impression that she is in partnership with Providence, and that Providence is the junior partner; that in this best of all possible worlds everything happens with the full knowledge and consent of Mrs. Simmings; so that even Mrs. Simmings's widowhood, one feels, has been somehow sanctioned by Mrs. Simmings. That Providence should have ventured to deprive Mrs. Simmings of a husband without first consulting Mrs. Simmings is inconceivable.

CHAPTER XXII

Mrs. Simmings Remains

Mrs. Simmings enters, carrying a cup. It is a small cup. It contains the nourishment judged by Mrs. Simmings to be commensurate with my needs.

As I have previously implied, refreshment in a highly concentrated form does not appeal to me. As for refreshment in the shape of what should by rights be absorbed through a feeding bottle, I can only say I have no time for it. I don't care if it has got *"And Invalids"* on the tin. Primarily it is an infant's food, and I maintain that food fit for infants is unfit for human consumption.

Mrs. Simmings's eye is upon me. Therefore I swallow the sickening mess. When that woman has gone I shall have a meal.

When *is* she going, by the way? When are

they all going? I observe with a sense of dull despair that the Sewing-Bee has resumed its sewing. The Sewing-Bee has an awful air of having settled down for the evening. This is strengthened by their chief's next proceeding.

"We must keep him bright and entertained," she announces to her underlings. "Mrs. Penny, hand me 'Morning Light.' "

For a moment I believe that Mrs. Simmings has gone mad; that she is demanding at seven o'clock in the evening that which is only obtainable in the forenoon, and even then could scarcely be handed to Mrs. Simmings by Mrs. Penny like a pound of tea.

But I am wrong. I ought to have known that I should be wrong and Mrs. Simmings right.

"Morning Light" is the parish magazine. I know it now. It has been read out to me from cover to cover by Mrs. Simmings. Thus have I been kept "bright and entertained" by this admirable female.

In a blasting voice she has read out to me

the Vicar's monthly address to his parishioners, an article on missionary work in the Umbawallah, and an account (referred to by the editor in a footnote as "a stirring human document") by one Amos Bodkin of How He Cured Himself of the Liquor Habit.

Until mentioned by Mrs. Simmings, I had never heard of the Umbawallah. The article leaves me hazy still as to its geographical, but well informed as to its moral, situation.

Its moral situation is of the very worst. Really, the goings on of the Umbawallians are not nice. Cannibalism appears to be one of their minor faults.

I gather that Umbawallah is in very foreign parts. It is this geographical remoteness, no doubt, that enables one of Mrs. Simmings's elevated moral character and delicacy of mind to read aloud the shocking details of Umbawallian depravity.

At times it would almost appear as though Mrs. Simmings *liked* to dwell upon this lamentable state of things in Umbawallah; as

though, devoid of vice herself, she yet derived a certain pleasurable excitement from the contemplation of vice in others.

This suspicion, of course, I instantly dismiss as preposterous. Righteous indignation with Umbawallah is bound to be the unmixed emotion in Mrs. Simmings's breast.

Mrs. Simmings proceeds to trumpet forth the wrestlings of Amos Bodkin with the spirits of evil.

In my opinion, she is a little inclined to lay undue stress upon this portion of "Morning Light"—almost as though the moral of the story had a personal application.

Really, to judge from Mrs. Simmings's manner, one might have imagined that I shared Mr. Bodkin's weakness and that Mrs. Simmings relied upon my adopting Mr. Bodkin's methods of overcoming it at the earliest possible moment.

"Yes," remarks Mrs. Simmings, eyeing me fixedly, "if yew trewly repent, yew can cure yerself. If yew feel trew shame and 'orror and remember to eat an apple every time yew

feel the cravin' a-comin' on, yew can cure yerself the same as Amos did."

How long *is* the Sewing-Bee going to stay? I venture to intimate to Mrs. Simmings, politely, that I would like to settle down for the night. To my astonishment, the suggestion is well received.

"That's right," says Mrs. Simmings; "time they all went." And obediently the Sewing-Bee prepares to depart.

I murmur words of gratitude, I shake eleven Little Slocum Mothers by the hand, I turn to bid "good night" to their commander. I trust she is no thought reader. (If she is not, it is, of course, merely because she has never taken the trouble to become one.) It might be embarrassing were she to read my thoughts just then. (Thank the Lord! What a supper I shall order as soon as she is gone!)

Mrs. Simmings stares at my outstretched hand with a lift of her powerful eyebrows.

"Yew needn't say good-night to me," she informs me. "*I* ain't a-goin'."

What!

"I ain't a-goin' to desert me post, as yew might 'ave known better than think it, young man," says Mrs. Simmings.

"But I should like to go to sleep," I remind her gently.

"Of course yew do; that's all right," she tells me. "And I'm a-goin' to stand by and see yew don't come to no 'arm."

Harm! What possible harm does the woman suppose I could come to in my sleep?

Mrs. Simmings explains. Symptoms—she's going to watch out for symptoms. She doesn't like the look of me at all, and she is sure fresh symptoms will break out presently. Between three and four in the morning, that's the ticklish time for sick folks, Mrs. Simmings declares.

Between three and four in the morning! It is at this point I have regretfully to record that I forget myself.

"Gracious heavens, is the woman going to stay here all night?" I appeal wildly,

to the petrified Sewing-Bee, arrested in their departure.

I am conscious that now I have been and gone and done it. Restraint has burst its bounds. My bottled-up feelings have bubbled forth.

But I don't care. I have ceased to care. I have suffered too much. The last straw has broken the camel's back. To get rid of that awful woman, to get rid of Mrs. Simmings, is all I care for now. I have endured to the utmost limits of endurance, and now——

The voice of Mrs. Simmings cuts in upon my fevered reflections—calm, majestic, powerful:

"The woman is a-goin' to stay all night, young man, and shame on yew for callin' me a woman, the way I've nursed yew and done for yew like as if yew was me own husband, of blessed memory."

"Woman—lady, I mean—I don't want to be nursed! I don't want to be done for! I want to be let alone!"

I am wild, desperate.

"Ravin'!" says Mrs. Simmings firmly. "Delirious, that's what he is."

"I won't be nursed! I am too ill to be nursed!"

"Stark, starin' delirious and ravin'!" repeats Mrs. Simmings.

"Go away! That's all I want. You go away! Leave me alone."

"It often takes 'em like that," explains Mrs. Simmings to the ceiling. "Takes a dislike to their nearest and dearest. He'll need a lot of watchin' through the night, he will. Want to throw off his bedclothes an' that. That's when they gets their death, if yew don't watch 'em."

"You're going to watch me all night?" I demand. By this time my excitement is rapidly giving way to the calmness of extreme despair.

"All night and for as long after as yew'll need it," Mrs. Simmings assures me. "An' if it kills me to do me duty, do me duty I always shall."

"You mean that you are going to nurse me till I am well?"

"Young man, that's what I mean, and when Ada Simmings means a thing she means it, and not wild horses wouldn't drag me asunder."

"You are not going to leave me till I get up again?"

"I am not!"

"Very well, then. I am going to get up—*now.*"

A shrill whistle from Thomas. Exclamations of horror from the Sewing-Bee. A flutter in the dovecote. Mrs. Simmings alone is unruffled.

"Leave him to me," she commands. "Mrs. Penny, Aunt Fisher, Mrs. Leach—all of yew, good-night. He'll be quiet enough alone with me."

Is it my fancy, or *is* there a sinister note in Mrs. Simmings's voice as she utters this last sentence? Is it—a threat? Is this woman hinting at some awful power that shall force me into submission?

Eleven trembling Little Slocum Mothers creep from the room.

"Thomas! Good-night."

Thomas turns to obey. So even *he,* Thomas, who obeys no one else, Thomas, for whom discipline does not exist, even he does Mrs. Simmings's bidding.

Really, there is something horrible, something inexpressibly shocking, about this.

I have a mad impulse to cry out to Thomas, to implore him not to leave me. I stifle it with an effort. Mrs. Simmings shall not think that I am afraid of her. Once let her suspect that and all will be over. Mrs. Simmings will continue to nurse me—to nurse me, perchance, into my grave.

So Thomas departs.

Mrs. Simmings and I are alone.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Only Way

Large, ample, magnificent, she looms above me, a very monument of power, of efficiency.

"Now, then, young feller, yew'n me's goin' to get along very nicely. I'm goin' to get meself a bit o' supper now, while yew goes to sleep. An' don't yew be afraid. If yew gets worse in the night *I* shall be there."

At these words a wild resolve takes shape in my brain. To fly. To leave Little Slocum. To escape from *everything*.

If I stayed, what would be my fate? To be nursed by Mrs. Simmings until I was well. (A dreadful analogy leaps to my mind. I had almost written: "To be hanged by the neck until I am dead.")

To be nursed by Mrs. Simmings. And then?

The Program! The Program was scarcely

begun. I had lived through but a single day of it. So, of course, the moment I was well enough there would be the Program—the Plowing Contest, the Progressive Whist Drive, the Vicar's Aunt, the Lecture on "The Childhood of Noah."

No, I must fly. It is the only way. I must fly. Now—at once! While Mrs. Simmings goes to get her supper.

Now, with the growing darkness to cover my flight, I may escape. If I waited till to-morrow all Little Slocum would have to be told—the Mayor, the Vicar, the committee—explanations, embarrassing scenes.

Besides, to-morrow I might be worse. Nursed all through the night by Mrs. Simmings—yes, I should certainly be worse. Then Mrs. Simmings would never let me go.

No, I could not risk it. Instant flight. That is the one thing to do.

I feign extreme lassitude. I murmur a sulky acquiescence. I must rouse no suspicion in Mrs. Simmings's breast. She must believe me to be cowed and beaten.

Mrs. Simmings gives me a sharp glance, sweeps out of the room, and—turns the key upon me! A dastardly trick. I hate these suspicious natures. But doubtless I am not the first man who has sought to escape from Mrs. Simmings.

I am foiled for the nonce. But only for the nonce. Come what might, I am determined to leave Little Slocum, to circumvent that Simmings woman.

I must be prepared. My ticket to Paddington—money for the journey. I capture my note-case and slip it into my pyjama-pocket.

Mrs. Simmings returns, laden with food. She eats, complacently. There is bread and ham and cheese and pickles and a pot of tea—food enough for three. I am beginning to hate the woman.

She goes on eating steadily. I am starving. The sight of Mrs. Simmings devouring hunks of ham and cheese and pickles is an abomination. I have never seen anything more unpleasant.

MRS. SIMMINGS RETURNS LADEN WITH FOOD

I would give anything for even one mouthful of that bread and cheese. Suppose I ask her for some? She would probably refuse. She seems hungry. She would say bread and cheese were bad for me.

I pretend to be falling asleep. I watch her with a small piece of eye. With luck she may eat herself into a torpid condition, drop off to sleep, and then —my bid for freedom!

Vain hope. Mrs. Simmings is not the torpid kind. She seems more wide-awake than ever. She surveys the room with the eye of a general and settles herself in the old wicker chair—the only "easy" piece of furniture in the room.

I must try sleeping a little more soundly. I do so—artistically. Though I say it myself, I sleep extremely well—all those little touches, don't you know—sighs and little snorts and puffs and beginnings of snores—not overdone, mind you. No one could have slept more convincingly. What *does* the woman want? Why doesn't she doze? No, there she sits, in her beastly armchair, beady-eyed, unwinking, wide awake.

She has got out her needlework now. I wonder savagely what miserable creature is going to wear the awful garment she is making.

The crackling of that abominable material is getting on my nerves. I shall scream in a minute. I can feel it coming on. But I must not scream. On no account must I allow myself to scream.

I long to give one blood-curdling yell, to startle Mrs. Simmings out of that maddening calm. But could the wildest, weirdest yell of mortal being do that? Could anything do it? I doubt it.

Yet—it would be worth trying. Think of the unholy joy of scaring that monumental mass of self-satisfaction, of seeing it start and jump, and possibly dither.

The temptation to try is terrible. I fight against it. But the rhythmic crackling of calico becomes intolerable. The placidity of Mrs. Simmings becomes intolerable. In another moment I shall either yell or burst.

Better not burst. Better—Holy Moses, what's that? A yell, but it is not my yell. My yell is frozen in my throat; it would have sounded a mere reedy piping compared to this —this devilish, demoniacal and pandemonic yelling. Not one yell, but many—blood-curdling, unearthly, frightful.

For one moment I am paralyzed. Then I remember Mrs. Simmings. I am conscious that Mrs. Simmings has started to her feet, she has flung open the window, she is leaning out.

One glance at her massive, crape-clad back. My opportunity has come. I am out of bed and down the stairs before I realize that I am bare-footed and in pyjamas. My hunted eyes

fall upon a pair of wading boots and—thank the Lord!—my mackintosh still hanging in the hall.

There is no one about. Those yells, of course, have drawn every soul into the street. I slip into the boots and mackintosh and make for the open. There is a crowd in the street outside the Sunrise Arms. But no one notices me. Public attention is centered upon another object—a swaying, gesticulating, yelling object in the middle of the roadway.

"Amos Bodkin," I hear some one say. "Drunk again."

So Amos has run out of apples.

CHAPTER XXIV

I Escape

I stay to hear no more. I have a lightning glimpse of Mrs. Simmings's large and powerful face peering out of my bedroom window. Then the face disappears. In another moment she will have discovered my absence. Good-by to Little Slocum.

Ten miles to the nearest railway station. Will she pursue me? Will she raise a hue-and-cry? I cannot doubt it. She is Mrs. Simmings. She will organize pursuit. She will inform the authorities that I am in a high state of fever, delirious, *non compos.* She will employ the fleetest runners in Little Slocum to bring me back, to rescue me, to restore me to her custody.

I cast a swift glance over my shoulder as I run. Yes, as I feared. A little knot of people has detached itself from the main crowd

and is following me. Following with frightful rapidity. Gaining upon me.

Rough going along a muddy country lane in wading boots three sizes too large. A fearful handicap.

Yes, they are gaining upon me. Unless I can increase my pace I shall be captured. I strain every nerve, every muscle. One mighty spurt and—damn! I have lost a boot. What a nightmare of mud! I grope about, softly swearing, in the growing dusk.

Emphatically damn! Impossible to arrive in Great Slocum with only one boot. Public suspicion would be aroused. Pyjamas, a mackintosh and *two* boots will take a little explaining; but—*one* boot—and *two* legs—impossible.

Where is this thrice-accursèd boot?

Ah! I have it! Filled with mud. This is no time for fads and fancies—a little mud, more or less—on with the boot, up and away!

They are almost upon me. I see them but dimly, but I hear the horrid squelching of their boots. Another spurt, or I am lost. If

only I can keep up this pace! If only—flop! wallop! damn!

Where am I? I ask from force of habit. I know only too well—I am in the ditch. Up to my knees in mud.

So all is over. In another second they will be upon me. I will not be captured without a struggle. They shall pay dearly for their victory. It shall be a fight to a finish!

But not so. There is no fight. Blessings on the failing light, they have not seen the accident. The darkness has swallowed me up.

They imagine they are still at my heels. They do not stop. They blunder on. They pass the spot where I lie concealed. Even had they stopped and gazed upon this very spot I doubt whether they would have seen me, so completely had I become a part of the ditch. I was at one with Nature, as it were. Nature, in the ditch, meant mud!

As I remove the more insistent mud from eyes, ears, nose and mouth I see clearly the course before me. I crawl out of the ditch

and over the hedge that borders the lane. I am in a field. I run, keeping close to the hedge. From one field into another, with here and there a fence to climb, I run, always with that road on the other side of the hedge.

I have gone perhaps a mile, perhaps two miles. I hear footsteps approaching. I wait behind the shelter of the hedge. I hear voices. Now I can distinguish what they are saying.

Hah! As I thought! My pursuers returning. They have given up the chase. Mrs. Simmings is not amongst them. For a while I keep to the field. Then back again into the road. On to Great Slocum.

Ten miles in a mackintosh and wading boots. Ten miles of squelching country road in rather less than two hours. A creditable record—what? But it is wonderful what you can do when you are in a hurry.

Great Slocum is mostly in bed when I arrive. It is just as well. I admit that my

appearance may not be strictly conventional. There is so much mud to be explained away,

TEN MILES IN A MACKINTOSH AND WADING BOOTS

even when one keeps the pyjamas out of sight.

The Station Hotel is disposed to be slightly suspicious. A sleepy porter takes

me for a colored gentleman. I have some little trouble in establishing my *bona fides,* but after a hasty wash I am recognized. My statement as to being summoned from a sick-bed to attend to pressing private affairs in town is received with politeness. My order for a room, a fire, and supper is executed with alacrity.

Thank goodness, there is another train to town to-night. It leaves me an hour to feed, to dry myself, to remove much mud from my clothing.

I am in the train. I have fed, I have dried myself, I have removed mud. I am conscious of a healthful glow. I have not felt so fit for ages.

Strange! After all I have suffered! After —why, of course! I see it all! What do the doctors tell us is the finest tonic for the circulation, the liver, the nerves? Why, a *ten-mile walk.* And I have done it. I have restored my circulation and shaken up my liver and soothed my nerves precisely by this means. I am a different man. And all through going to

Little Slocum. Yes, after all, Little Slocum has cured me.

All the same, it *nearly* killed me as well.

So hey! for peaceful Piccadilly! And ho! for the calm backwater of Leicester Square!

THE END